

RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR

# ウォルテニア 戦記



Ryota Hori

保利亮太

ILLUST. bob

# **RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR**

— Wortenia Senki —

## **- VOLUME 3 - Wortenia Peninsula Arc (I)**

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**[ Hasutsuki ]**





振り向いた飛鳥<sup>あすか</sup>の目に、黒い法衣のような物を身にまとった女と、  
それを守る様に取り囲む数人の男が目映った。

RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR

# ウォルテニア 戦記





「坊や！」

そろそろ峠を超えるよ！」

「良くおいで下された！」

歓迎いたしますぞ。

御子柴男爵殿」



「お目通りがかない恐悦に存じます。

私が当クリストフ商会の会長代理、

シモーヌ・クリストフでございます」



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# ウォルテニア 戦記



Ryota Hori

保利亮太





CONTENTS

プロローグ ————— 005

第一章 ————— 024

逃避行の始まり

第二章 ————— 063

北へ

第三章 ————— 110

北の盟主

第四章 ————— 141

クリストフ教会

第五章 ————— 181

虐げられし者

エピローグ ————— 230

あとがき ————— 246

HOLY  
QWILTANTIA  
EMPIRE



KINGDOM OF HELNESGOULA

O'LTORMEA EMPIRE

SOUTHERN KINGDOMS

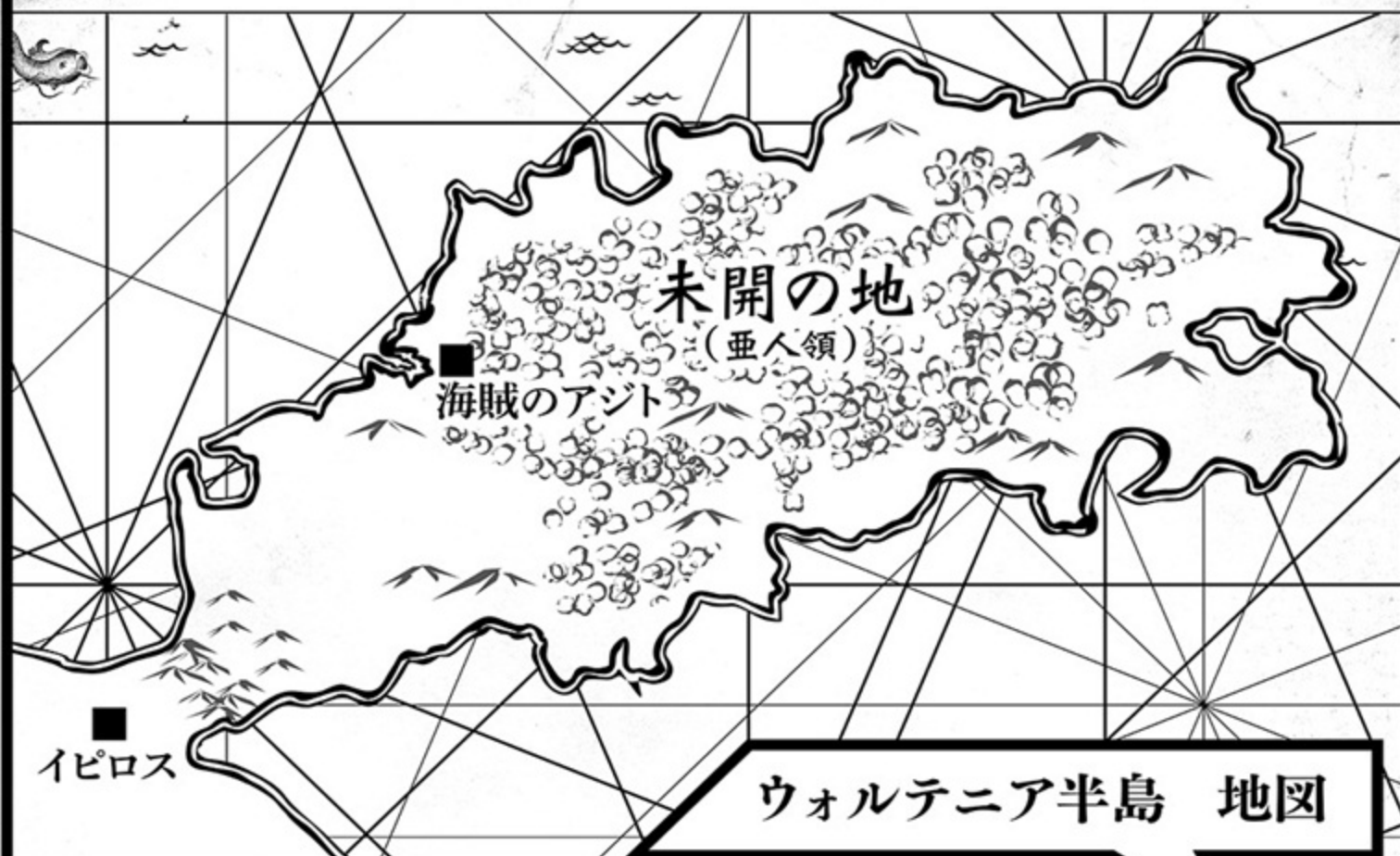
KINGDOM  
OF  
RHOADSERIA

KINGDOM  
OF  
XARGODA

KINGDOM  
OF  
MYEST

WORTENIA PENINSULA

# WORLD MAP of 《RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR》



## 西方大陸 地図





# Chapter 1

## Towards The Peninsula 1

*Day 275 after being summoned to another world.*

“I wonder, how long has it been since then?”

Clear blue sky. Calm wind runs through the royal capital Preaus.

No one would think that the kingdom where the city is located just experienced civil war.

The scenery spread in front of Elena's eyes is calm and full of vigor. Elena muttered those words while gazing at the landscape through the window.

“Are you talking about Mikoshiba-dono? It has been half a month since he left. If they don't find any obstacle along the way, they should arrive at the peninsula about now.”

Her aide who was checking some documents answered Elena's muttering.

“I see... I guess that's how it is...”

Her eyes turned toward the north.

“Do you regret it?”

“.....”

Elena answered her adjutant question with silence.

Or rather, there's no need for her to say anything.

“There's no other way... Her majesty Lupis herself had commanded it. That was the ruler's decision...”

Despite thinking about Elena's feeling, the adjutant himself supported Queen Lupis' decision.

He has no ulterior motive, he just thinks professionally. And many knights and nobles also think the same.

(Elena-sama... Certainly, we owe him... But, for the nation...)

Ryouma is someone who's too powerful to be left alone by the nation. Thus it seemed like a matter of course for the adjutant to think such thing.

"Let's leave this talk for later, now I would like to talk about Mikhail's appointment as General. I know Elena-sama has dissatisfaction regarding this, but please try to restrain your thought for now."

Elena nodded her head toward her adjutant suggestion.

Mikhail's mistakes were already well known throughout the kingdom. However, for Lupis, he's the most trustworthy man.

For the knights, nobles and also the citizens, many of them want Elena to continue as the General, but everyone knows Lupis' thoughts. If by any chance Lupis doubt Elena's loyalty just a little bit, Lupis would be willing to dismiss her and propose Mikhail as the General.

As a person, Elena is someone who never underestimated Mikhail. It is without a doubt that Mikhail and Meltina would be the future of Rozeria Kingdom's military leaders.

But Elena thought it was too early for them to lead the army. Composure, depth of their knowledge, martial arts, and strategy. They are lacking all of those aspects.

One supposedly lost their qualifications to get promoted due to abandoning their mission just because of impatience.

(I know that. But I can't leave the General position to the current Mikhail... And, I also have betrayed that man... Even if for argument's sake that I did it for the nation...)



She knows thinking like that is an indication of being naive.

She also understands that even he did not help her solve her problem not out of goodwill. However, because of him, she was able to get the opportunity to kill Hodram.

Within her heart, regret was swirling about. But, even so, she could not abandon the country which she was born into.

Currently, the present Rozeria Kingdom is in danger.

From Elena's perspective, Queen Lupis as a leader was too immature.

Political ability, Diplomacy, Economy. Except for the military, she lacked all of them.

As the head of the nation, she's not very reliable.

The reason for that is also clear. She lacked the experience in internal affairs, and also for the better or worse, her own good nature as a person.

As for knowledge, she at least possesses a sufficient level due to being raised as royalty.

And because of the people of the kingdom like her, as a royalty, she's not that bad. But the problem is how she behaves as a ruler.

Especially the power structure she currently aims to build, Lupis wants to keep all the power centralized within her arms reach. That is a minus.

A ruler who can't take decisive action. Aides who do not have the necessary intellect. The nobles who began to move secretly behind the scene. And, lastly, the kind heart she possesses when it comes to her family or close associates.

After only just two months, she already reinstates Mikhail.

Everyone understands that as a ruler, she needs trustworthy people around her to rebuild the nation.

However, for a person who committed such grave mistakes yet received such light punishment, while the commoner who actually ended the civil war is being pushed to the Wortenia peninsula, was her majesty unable to see things properly? Is what Elena had thought.

Her Majesty doesn't understand.

The civil war might have ended, and the decline in national strength was minimum. But, the internal dispute has not decreased at all.

Or rather, it has gotten worse.

On the surface, the kingdom seemed have regained its stability and peace. However, it's actually a situation similar to that of a castle tower being built on a foundation of sand.

It is very delicate and prone to collapse. That was the situation the Rozeria Kingdom is currently in.

The circumstance might be different if the people who assist the queen are more resourceful. Or at least, if the Queen herself was a person with strong determination, the situation might change.

But the reality is different.

The wall of status between commoner and ruling class within the kingdom was very high, both the knights and the nobles hate the young man who managed to get all the credit during the civil war. If that man becomes Lupis aides and helps to steer the country, the current crisis would be something avoidable.

Elena opposed the decision where Mikoshiba Ryouma has to leave the nation.

She wishes for him to remain in the Kingdom.

However, Lupis ended up afraid of him. And Lupis ended up throwing him to the Wortenia peninsula instead.

“Haaah...”

Elena sighed greatly, she began to turn her eyes back to the document once again.

No matter how much trouble one is in, the reality won't change. She already made her decision.

As the current General of the kingdom, she strives to rebuild the country. That is why she did not say anything when Lupis made her decision.

Right now, Elena who's currently the General, can't object to the new Queen's decision.



If she recklessly speaks her mind, the current state that is already fragile enough would end up breaking apart.

“Rebuilding the nation come first now. Even if you're dissatisfied, you can't change the future of this country just by being reckless. Besides, despite being a commoner, he was being elevated to a noble and given land. Although it was different from the first promise, there should be no problem.”

“I hope that's true...”

Elena felt fear after listening to how her aides speak about it. Most of the nobles seemed to have also thought the same as him. Only a few people under Earl Bergston understood what implication that decision entails.

(It was as if letting go a poisonous snake in your own garden...)

In Elena's eyes, she can see that Ryouma hides raging anger and hatred. Just like flowing magma under the ground, quietly, slowly, surely surfacing.

She understood that because she had already spent her days hiding such feelings when she waited for her revenge time against Hodram.

(Hatred toward those holding authority, and those privileged class... I still remember them clearly...)





Although as an option Lupis' choice was something not to be praised, it was also not something to be condemned.

However, she made a mistake as to how she proceeded with it.

It should be fine if she just asks Ryouma kindly for his consent and explained the situation that lead to it. However, the status difference between the two got in between them

For Her Majesty, she thought that common people should be silent and listen to her words since she's the ruler. Or at least that's what Lupis' behavior indicates.

It is common in this world that a ruling class trampled over the commoner just because of their identity.

Elena herself was born as a commoner, she was made to taste a lot of regrets because of the same issue. Despite that, she chose to become a knight for the kingdom and rise through the ranks.

But that was because she IS a citizen of the kingdom.

That's why, despite being made to taste a lot of regrets, she still loves her nation, but what would happen if the person in question does not have affection for the country? The result would be a raging anger and hatred.

(I wonder, if someday, I would have to fight him?)

Such anxiety appears inside her heart. However, she does not have any intention to voice out such anxiety.

In fact, if he were to come and execute his revenge, she's going to throw her sword in silently.

After all, for her, his revenge is just and right.

(Five years huh?)

The day before Ryouma left the royal capital Pireaus, he told her something.

It was the grace time left for this nation.

Gerhardt's status has been demoted to that of a Viscount, his territory was also

changed into a land near the border south of Rozeria Kingdom.

There is a remarkable difference in terms of income compared to his previous territory. However, the kingdom can't do many things in case of his personal assets, thus he has no economic problems.

It was a month after the civil war ended.

Elena heard that he already made a move toward the nobles who survived the purge and kept them close to him.

That alone was the result of Queen Lupis appointing Earl Bergston who was from neutral faction into an important position, those who lost their jobs because of it, flocked to Gerhard's side.

They seem to be rebuilding the nobles faction with Gerhard as the head.

Of course, there also the matter regarding princess Ladine.

Thanks to Gerhard, she was officially recognized as a member of royal family.

That itself is not enough to cause a problem. But because the Queen hesitates to execute Gerhard, he manages to begin a fresh start.

No, rather, Elena felt that Lupis is being cornered despite being the winner of the civil war.

Hodram who has ties with Thalluja kingdom ends up dead. Straining the relationship between the two nations.

Zalda And Mist kingdom are far from a close relationship. No one knows when war could break out between the two countries.

The Rozeria Kingdom is not safe yet.

While worrying about the enemies outside the kingdom, there's the problem of grace period left for Queen Lupis to consolidate her authority.

And that grace period is just estimation. Looking at the reality, it seems it would be shorter than the estimation.

"Lupis will die, unless she managed to consolidate her authority within five years... Well, I guess you understand that already... I just don't want Elena-san being rolled up into it."

Ryouma told her those words while laughing.

When she saw that, Elena realize that Ryouma's heart has already abandoned Lupis.

And his words are purely out of concern toward Elena. He gives her advice so that she does not get destroyed because of an incompetent ruler.

"Five years huh?"

"Eh? What did you say?"

Her adjutant asks such question after hearing Elena's murmur.

"No, it's nothing... Continue sorting the document..."

In accordance with her words, her adjutant gives her new documents.

She looked at it briefly signed it and put a seal on it.

Until the day Ryouma told her about come, there is still time.

(Ryouma-kun... Please survive... And once again...)

Elena prayed from the bottom of her heart for the young man who is far away from her, just like a grandmother praying for her own grandchildren.

Hoping for a day they meet again.

The sun rising above the head, pouring its light toward the people walking along the highway.

Because of the civil war, the distribution of logistics within the Rozeria Kingdom have been disturbed, but due to the internal administrative dispute, the problem was delayed more than 2 months after the civil war had ended. Right now, the life of the people has returned to that of the calm, pre-civil war one.

Meanwhile, A group of people who bore a characteristic crest is moving through the highway.



Flag with a pure black background. On the surface, there's a crest of twin snakes with red eyes entangling a sword. <TLN to Editors: Similar to that of Caduceus Symbol>

The eyes of the snakes give the impression of staring at the surrounding.

When Mikoshiba Ryouma took up the position of Baron, that was the coat of arms he made at the royal capital, the crest of Mikoshiba household.

The sword represents military power, and the snakes symbolized cunning and wisdom, it can be said that the crest represents a man called Mikoshiba Ryouma.

“Boy! We're about to arrive at the fort city Epiroz!”

「坊や！」

そろそろ峠を超えるよ！」



While her crimson hair swayed due to the winds, Lione shouted towards her back.

“Indeed. Finally huh... My ass is already sore...”

“Ma~ Ma~, Ryouma-sama, please endures it a little bit more alright? I will apply some medicine after we arrive at the nearest inn.”

“If you want, how about changing into a carriage? If we got into the carriage, we can immediately apply the medicine.”

Toward Laura's words, Sara made some interjection. It seems like the two sisters are in the middle of the war to win Ryouma's affection as their master.

“O-Oh, it's fine... I need to get used riding a horse after all...”





Ryouma answered the two of them while enduring the pain on his butt.

He has not much experience riding a horse.

Not to mention a car seat, even a saddle of a bicycle is more softer than a saddle used for a horse.

As a person from a modern-day Japan, for him riding a horse for a long period of time, no wonder his ass end up hurting.

At the time he was chasing after Hodram, the sisters taught him how to ride a horse, but then again that was an emergency measure.

And being used for marching for a half-month during the military campaign., the saddle plating have already come off.

“Well, be a little bit patient! A little bit more and we will be able to see the walls of Epiroz city.”

The total numbers of this group including Lione is 30 people.

Other than Lione, Bolts, Genou, Sakuya, the Marfisto sisters, and Ryouma, there are 23 mercenaries.

It might be said as impressive in term of employing mercenaries. However, in term of managing territory, such number of people are very lacking.

(I guess I need people who can handle office work huh...)

Ryouma is someone who has a good mentality and direction when it comes to the military.

Although the current power he has can only be said as a small unit compared to an army of a nation.

(Well I guess I have no choice other than moving one step at a time... There's no way the country I plan to make can suddenly be established.)

While Ryouma thinks that, he directed his gaze forward.

(I will survive! And... Lupis! I will definitely make you pay for what you've done... With interest added too...)

In his mind, new determination surges.

Who would expect, that the group that about to enter the fort city of Epiroz would influence the situation within the west continent.

Western Continent Calendar, August 5, 2812.

A new page of history is about to be written in the book of history of the western continent.



# Chapter 2

## Towards The Peninsula 2

*5th day, 8th month, the year 2812. Western Continent Calendar.*

Fort city Epiroz.

The city is located northwest of the Rozeria Kingdom, and it is a key border point.

The city was protected from invaders by a 10 meter high wall.

The city itself has 3 entrance points. They are positioned at the east, west and the north side of the city. The lords castle is located in the south.

Everyone within the kingdom knows that the city is a defense facility, a protective wall between the Rozeria and Zalda Kingdoms. The result, the citizens know the city as a city that was able to prevent multiple invasions by the neighboring country. However, those who live in the city know that living in this city feels like a kettle lid holding down what's inside...

Currently, Ryouma's group is inside a room they rented in an inn within the city.

After finishing all the procedures they reached the fortified city, the gateway toward Wortenia peninsula.

Currently, Ryouma's core member up to Bolts is inside the room while relaxing.

They are discussing their future plans.

“Because this was a border town, it is no wonder being a defense specialized, but it seems like it was not built just for preventing invasions.”

Bolts said those words while shrugging his shoulders.

There is something that someone who has been working as a mercenary for years always does first before doing other things.

And that is purchasing and gathering information the moment they arrived at the inn.

“Rather than invasion, they built the city like this to prevent monsters entering the Rozeria Kingdom, am I right?”

Bolts nodded his head.

“It seems like the place we're heading is more severe than we had initially thought...”

Everyone nodded their head agreeing with Bolts' words. They all know that it was a harsh land since they were at the royal capital. However...

“For now our first priority is prepare everything we need in this city...”

What they need now is detailed information regarding the fort city and the Wortenia peninsula. If they entered the peninsula just like this, they would undoubtedly end up dead. Geographical information, necessary equipment, Ryouma does not have all of these aspects in his possession.

Not only that, pirates and demi-human villages seems to have existed within the peninsula. Next, there's also a problem of food and water.

There's no doubt that they can't buy them from the pirates and demi-humans. Which means, until Ryouma and the others can establish a town, they would have to buy their necessity from this fortified city. Considering that, one has to also carefully choose a trading partner properly.

They need to know all the circumstances within this neighborhood.

Because they have to do their best to survive.

“We sisters will be the ones who are going around for negotiation with the various companies...”

“Fumu, I leave it to you both then...”

Laura has picked up both sisters role.

Ryouma also understand that she has a clear understanding of what to do for the

present situation.

Even Sara also understands that which she, in turn, nodded agreeing with her sister suggestion.

“Then Bolts-san should go to the guild. Gather information about the peninsula as much as possible. Especially the locations of rivers and lakes. And don't forget all the information regarding the monsters inhabiting the peninsula.”

“Understood, young master! Please leave it to me!”

Bolts tap his chest with his right arm.

After nodded Ryouma turned his eyes toward Genou.

For him, there are no qualified people other than Genou and Sakuya when it comes to gathering information at any place.

Noticing Ryouma's gaze, Genou's eyes shine sharply.

“Genou investigate the influential people in this town... Family composition, character, weakness, strength... I want all of that information since we're going to make our base here for a while...”

“I see... Indeed, it is best for us to make sure the influential people in this town are on our side...”

Ryouma nodded his head, satisfied with Genou's answer.

“However, don't do anything noticeable alright? It would be troublesome if they turn hostile toward us right now...”

“Please rest assured... I will answer my lord's expectations without fail...”

Genou gently lowered his head.

“Boy... Then should I get some mercenaries?”

While Sakuya joined Genou in gathering information regarding the influential people,



only Ryouma and Lione left.

But, it seems like Lione already understand what her role was.

“Indeed... Only Lione-san is capable of doing this job, please select capable people with good skills... I would like to increase our numbers as much as possible, but since we don't yet have clear revenue, we need to keep it reasonable...”

“Should we offer them knight job?”

“No... In the future, I will employ all of you as knights under me, but for now, I want to hire people as mercenaries employed by me...”

Of course, he wants to hire people as knights under him, but it would be too dangerous to hire people in a situation where everything is not yet clear. Anyways, it was not even clear if Ryouma can secure the salaries if he wants to hire them as knights.

“I see, I guess that makes sense... It may be better for us to keep the knight's employment away until the territory development has gone on track...”

Lione who has the experience of leading a mercenary group understands how big military expenditure can get.

“Well if that the case please leave it to me! How many people are you going to hire? It will cost money if you want skilled people, you understand that, yes?”

Naturally, good mercenary comes with high price. If Ryouma did not say how much budget he has, Lione won't be able to begin the negotiation.

In response to her question, Ryouma's eyes turned to Laura. All of his money is in the hands of the Marfisto sisters.

“We have 35 million baht in funds. This all is Ryouma-sama's personal assets.”

Lione opened her eyes wide hearing Laura's words.

“Eh?! You're actually quite rich aren't you?!”

Her reaction was natural.

Because Ryouma's assets are comparable to that of intermediate nobles.

It was the money they got after taking the slave trader's gold and selling all the jewels.

"However, we will need some funds when we begin creating a village. Developing the land, and we also need some helping hands..."

"In other words, we can only use a small part of that budget?"

Answering Lione's question, Ryouma nodded his head.

This money will become his and the others lifeline. He has to spend it carefully if he wants to survive.

"How about 5 million baht? Hiring them for one year, including their food and water, we should get around 200 people, I think?"

Toward Lione's suggestion, Laura nodded her head in agreement.

"Sure, if it was that much we can prepare it..."

"Alright then! I leave the rest to you Lione-san..."

In respond to Ryouma's words Lione nodded with great power. For her who has the experience of leading a mercenary group, hiring someone with good ability is as easy as eating breakfast. It was a perfect role for her.

Now, Ryouma is the only one who has not yet discussed his schedule.

"Then, what Ryouma-sama planning to do?"

"Me huh? I think I should meet with Earl Salzberg."

Answering Sara's question, Ryouma told everyone what he was planning to do since a while ago.

“Isn't that person the Epiroz city lord? Why do you want to meet that person? He might involve you with something unpleasant you know? Besides, the nobles here despise commoner rising in status, won't they harass you?”

Everyone nodded their head agreeing with Lione's words.

Her anxiety can be said as something understandable.

Because of Lupis' betrayal, a ruler of this very country. They had become distrustful toward the royalty and nobility of this country.

However, Genou seems to agree with Ryouma.

“I see... I think that was not a bad idea though?”

“What do you mean? Genou.”

Lione can't comprehend why Genou agreed with Ryouma.

She turned her questioning gaze toward Genou.

This is where she can be said as a good leader. She has her own opinion yet still willing to understand others. This quality is the one which the nobility within the Rozeria Kingdom is lacking.

“Certainly, not many people within nobility is good... However, we should not isolate ourselves either just because we have misgiving feelings toward them... Looking at the reality, Epiroz city is next to Wortenia peninsula, it is not a bad thing to meet the lord of the city... In fact, it might end up troublesome if we don't visit them immediately and they took it as an insult.”

Hearing Genou's words, Lione can imagine that they will take it as an insult.

In any case, right now, for Ryouma and the others to be able to survive within Wortenia peninsula, they need some supply from the city. If Ryouma makes a mistake and the Earl's mood turn bad and then ends up putting some pressure so that Ryouma was unable to do any business in the city, Ryouma would end up dried up alone.

“...Certainly... That's highly possible...”



“See... Noble people have a high pride after all...”

Everyone is convinced by Genou's words.

“Well, for now, I would like to see what kind of person he is and if he would become our friend or enemy.

Everyone nodded after listening Ryouma's words.

It is true that they have been betrayed by the royalty and the nobles. However, it does not mean they have to stop trusting all nobles.

In the end, whether or not someone deserves the trust, one should judge someone else individually not based on the group they are born or belong to...



“My lord... Do you need something from me?”

Genou who should've left the room after the discussion has come back inside the room.

Ryouma turned his gaze.

“Indeed. I have something to ask...”

Ryouma's face does not show any surprise when Genou opened the door without any sound.

(Fuh, did he notice my presence beforehand? Has my skill become dull or something? No, I guess it was his ability...)

At a young age, Genou had seen much bloodshed. As a member of the elders within his clan, he rarely did field work, but even with that, his skill can be regarded as one of the best.

(As expected... This man is the same with the first generation...)



Genou's line of sight examines Ryouma.

“What's wrong, Genou?”

Ryouma who feels Genou hot gaze asked him a question. His gaze is looking at Genou with suspicion.

“No, please forgive me... So, my lord, what do you need from me?”

Genou lowered his head respectfully and begin sitting down facing Ryouma.

“Well... I have something that I want you to do... But before that, there's something I want to hear, is that alright?”

“Understood... Please ask anything...”

It is unlikely for Ryouma to dismiss him this late in the game. Which means Ryouma wants to ask something that he doesn't want Bolts and Lione heard.

(Probably, it's about Sakuya and me... Even if I've pledged my allegiance I can't buy his trust that easy huh?)

Genou understood Ryouma mind quickly. Their first encounter was when he and Sakuya perform their mission to assassinate Ryouma.

But Ryouma ended up employing the assassin that came to assassinate him instead. Which in turn shows the magnitude the human being called Mikoshiba Ryouma. However, at the same time, Ryouma took one step back when it comes to trusting Genou and Sakuya.

He does not yet trust Genou and Sakuya completely.

(Well I guess that is natural... After all, I also have not yet told everything to him either...)

Genou muttered those words inside his heart.

It was a relationship where they both can't trust each other yet. But it does not mean

they have a dubious relationship. It would be more accurate that they are waiting for the right times.

And their relationship might change according to how Ryouma makes their move from now on.

(Should I talk about everything? No... It's still too early... I can't entrust my family future to him yet...)

His decision would decide the future of his entire clan.

It would be natural for Genou being cautious.

“Relax, I just want to ask you something simple... Why do you want to serve me?”

Genou wondered if Ryouma actually able to read minds. Ryouma's question was the things he was contemplating about.

The question which Genou did not want to answer yet.

However, Ryouma took Genou's silence as an answer.

“You can't tell me anything yet huh?”

They both gaze at each other straight.

(I don't want to lie...)

He thought that, but Genou mouth feels heavy.

If it was about lies, then Genou is confident that he can say as many as he wanted. But if he does that, he won't get any trust.

He can only keep silent, which does not deny nor affirms Ryouma's question.

After a long silence, RYouma shrugged his shoulders as if given up.

“Fine... I guess you have your own reason. I will not ask any further...”



Hearing Ryouma's words, Genou showed a surprised looks.

“Are you really okay with that?”

“Of course not... But I don't think you keep silence out of malice... I do feel like you have some secret that you keep from me, but let's just wait until you want to say it then...”

Ryouma felt strongly that Genou served him for some kind of purpose.

However, since he does not feel any malice from it, he let it pass.

In fact, if he felt some malice from it even if it was just a little, Ryouma would mercilessly get rid Genou and Sakuya. Even if they both share the same Japanese blood just like him.

(I guess, this much is fine for now... If the time comes, the other side will come to me... For now, let's fix the problem we have on hand first...) That is what Ryouma thinks.

Besides, he needs as many helping hands as possible right now.

“By the way, Genou... I'd like to employ your clan for some work, can I?”

“That is... Of course.”

Hearing Ryouma's question, Genou regained his calmness. At the same time, his calm brain immediately tried to find out what Ryouma wants him to do.

(He wants to hire my clan... Which means he does not want to move Sakuya or me away, that means the job won't be around Epiroz... It can't be, did he want to assassinate Lupis?)

Considering Ryouma's personality, that is very likely to happen. He's someone who never forgets someones gratitude, but also never forgives someone who does harm to him.

Despite their short relationship, Genou was able to understand Ryouma that much.

Considering how Lupis forcibly threw him into the frontier territory, it is no wonder for Ryouma to retaliate with assassination.

However, Genou dismisses such thought by his own.

(No... For him to ask that... It would be very unlikely...)

When they are at the royal capital, there's that choice. But since they are already in front of the peninsula. There would be no point for him to kill Lupis after coming this far.

(If he killed Lupis, he might get caught in something troublesome again... It is too reckless to do that when he still does not have his own base yet... which means...)

It would take several years to develop the peninsula as a territory. If Ryouma screwed the country now, he won't have the time to develop the territory instead.

There's no way Ryouma would choose such option with little profit.

“The person I want you to deal with is... Wallace Heinkell. The guild master of port town Fulzad.”

Hearing the name that came out from Ryouma, Genou tilt his head.

Of course, Genou had heard of someone with that name. It was the name of the person who has trapped Ryouma. It was the name that came out several times when they are discussing their plan.

But, all of their problems with him should have been settled.

“What's with that strange look? Was it that surprising? Do you want to know why?”

Toward Ryouma's question, Genou nods his head obediently.

“Yes... My lord's and everyone's innocence should have been proven... Why did you want to get rid of that person now?”

Is it just simple revenge? If so, then Genou have misjudged Ryouma.

Right now, Ryouma and the others need money no matter how much it is... There's no future for a human who gives out their money to satisfy their individual revenge when they are in such dire situation.

Which means, there's no future if he entrusts his family to Ryouma.

However, Genou's uneasiness is a mere imaginary fear.

“Indeed, with Lupis power, we were able to prove our innocence. However, with the same power, Lupis can make us guilty again, no?... Wallace had his way once, putting us in predicament. It is natural for us to hate him... But for him, we who survive has become a nuisance... At the time when he thought we've become too much of nuisance, won't he form an alliance with Lupis then?”

Listening to Ryouma's explanation, Genou immediately aware of such possibility.

The ruler of the Rozeria Kingdom and Guild Master. Certainly, that would be troublesome to handle if they join hands.

“Crush the seed before it can even bloom, is it?”

Ryouma nodded his head.

“Understood... I will dispatch someone with the best skills among my clan's members to perform the task...”

“That would be a great help... I can't have you or Sakuya go after all, since it would be too far.”

It would take two months for the trip between Epiroz and Fulzad, another half month to prepare for the assassination.

There's no time to do all that, when there's a much more important problem on Ryouma's hand.

“About the reward... How much?”

“No, there's no need for such thing.”

“...Are you sure?... No, I guess you have some condition?”

Speaking about the Guild master, it is a big deal to assassinate such person. It would be no surprise if Genou demands reward around 100,000 or 200,000. Yet he asks none... That means there's a condition attached.

“Yes... There's one thing...”

“Fine, go ahead and talk...”

In this day, what kind secret agreement Ryouma and Genou made, no one knows.

Only the heaven and the moon that shine brightly in the sky know.



# Chapter 3

## Towards The Peninsula 3

*7th day, 8th month, the year 2812. Western Continent Calendar.*

A carriage stopped in front of the Earl's house.

The sky has become completely dark, people can only walk around while holding a candle.

The black painted two horse carriage stopped in front of the mansion. It is not something nobles would usually use.

But the one riding the carriage does not care about such things.

He hurriedly procures the carriage after the two sisters make a fuss about how he should maintain a minimum appearance as noble.

Servants who stood in line in front of the doorway lowered their heads all at once the moment Ryouma gets down from the carriage.

“““Welcome, Mikoshiba-sama.”““

As expected of servants serving an Earl family. They welcomed Ryouma with such impeccable conduct. Two people then appear as if waiting for the servants to speak those words first.

“Welcome, welcome! Baron Mikoshiba-dono.”

The man who welcomes him exaggeratedly while raising his arm is the lord of the fortified city Epiroz, Earl Salzberg.

His height is around 180cm. His age is around late 30.

He's a middle-aged man with his belly pushing forward a little, but one can see that he was a warrior. Might be due to the city being near the border.



「良くおいで下された！」

歓迎いたしますぞ。

御子<sup>みこ</sup>柴男<sup>しば</sup>爵殿

(I heard it was a prestigious family that has been around since the founding of Rozeria Kingdom... Which in turn makes them not your ordinary noble family... But what's up with that greeting? Somehow it feels disgusting...)

Ryouma who receive extremely polite greeting end up feels uneasy.

When it comes to rank, his rank is two level below that of an Earl rank.

Ryouma felt it as something very unnatural for the Earl to welcome him who's a vagabond just the other day like this.

Ryouma braced himself. After all, he once took such behavior from Lupis for granted and was betrayed by her. It is reasonable for him to be more cautious.

Despite feeling like that, he did not show it on his face.

Ryouma smiled and lowered his head slightly to express his gratitude just like how a noble does things, and the one who taught him the manners of nobility was Laura.

"I'm very sorry for visiting so suddenly today. As someone who's just a greenhorn, I would like to ask Earl Salzberg his continued guidance."

Today, the attire Ryouma wore is not something spectacular.

Although he had money from selling the things he got from killing the slave trader, he needs that money to build the territory. He can't use too much money in something unnecessary. But then, nobles have to protect their honor. He can't just visit them with a commoner shirt and trousers.

That's why today he wears black pants, silk shirt, and a belt with gold like buckle.

When going outdoors he also put a cloak over his clothes. Even with all of that, this is the bare minimum of clothes for nobles.

The minimum amount he needs to protect his honor as a noble.

The Earl in front of him is actually in contrast compared to him. He wears various jewelry to express his authority for being born as a noble.

The articles make him look dignified but does not make him feel vulgar either. His shirt buttons are made in the shape of pearls. On his chest, there's a brooch with the shape

of a flower.

Despite such glamorous looks, his wife who's standing next to him is actually worse.

Give or take, her age is around 30.

She wore a silk dress that was designed to show her cleavage. Her dress is dyed pure white, matching her shining golden hair. She has a small silver crown atop of her head and large ruby and sapphire rings on her hands.

She's exactly a walking gem.

From the sense of modern people, her appearance has too many decorative items.

However, with her smile showing her elegance, she manages to keep her beauty with exquisite balance.

(Fancy but not vulgar... I guess this is the thing called nobility character huh?)

Ryouma evaluated the two people smiling in front of him.

"Please come in. It must be hard with the long journey from the royal capital. Please relax inside our house tonight. Isn't that right, Dear?"

Earl Salzberg nods greatly responding to his wife's words.

"My wife is right, please rest at our place and heal your fatigue. After all, there won't be any towns or villages once you enter Wortenia peninsula... And until the territory is developed in the future, it would be necessary to carry supplies from Epiroz. Since our territory is next to each other, I hope we have an everlasting relationship!"

"Thank you, I express my deepest gratitude..... From now on, I'll be in your care..."

Ryouma lower his head slightly toward the Earl.

(Fuuh... My purpose for coming here have been known huh? From the way he talks, he seems wiling to cooperate in terms of purchasing goods... But first, I need to find out if that is really what's inside their heart...)



Ryouma eyes shone sharply.



Ryouma is accompanied by the Earl toward the table.

“Well now, we've prepared everything for the sake of welcoming Baron Mikoshiba today, I asked the chef to perform his extraordinary cooking skills. Unlike the royal capital, there's not much product in this remote area, but there's quantity, please relish to your hearts content.”

Along with Earl Salzberg's words, the door of the hall was opened up, and maids came in with dishes on a cart.

“This is...”

It was natural for Ryouma to be lost for words when looking at the dishes being arranged on the table.

There's a whole roasted pig, various cuts of beef, bird meat, and then fish meat, there are also various vegetables and seaweed presented as salad. Seasonal fruit chilled by using crushed ice.

The table that can easily seat 20 people was overflowing with foods.

“Oh dear, this is very embarrassing. Perhaps this is not usual at the royal capital but when a guest visits, it is a custom for us to welcome them with more food than can be eaten... Well, it is just a custom from the countryside, consider it as a token of wanting to build a good relationship.”

Earl Salzberg said those words while stroking his head.

“No no, as an upstart I'm very grateful toward Earl Salzberg's warm welcome.”

“Hahahaha! I guess an upstart always being this humble. Mikoshiba-dono, you're someone who has made remarkable achievements during the civil war. I heard the princess trusts you very much... On the other hand, I can't move even one step due to my anxiety that the Zalda Kingdom might make their move.”

Ryouma made an amiable laugh in response to the Earl's words.

"Dear? Enough with the story. The food will get cold you know?"

The Earl's wife named Yuria warned him.

"Oh right! That was rude of me... Oi! Pour some wine into Mikoshiba-dono's glass."

Following the Earl's words, the crimson wine was poured into the glass in front of Ryouma.

"Well then... To celebrate Mikoshiba-dono's prosperity and relationship between our families! Cheers!"

Together with the Earl's words, Ryouma raised his glass.

A rich grape fragrance spreads inside his mouth. It has a very stimulating flavor. Afterwards the deep richness of the wine spreads through his whole body.

He can feel the wine easily slide down his throat. It was sliding just like silk.

(Such fine quality wine...)

Ryouma is a high school student who supposedly never know the taste of an alcohol, However, because of his grandfather he was already experienced with alcohol, and since he came to this world, he he drinks it almost every day.

From his experience in this world, the wine the Earl has offered is one of the highest quality.

While he was staying at Pireaus castle, he was offered luxury liquor, but the one he is drinking currently is a grade higher.

(The cooking, and this wine... What's going on? No rather, how did they manage to do all of this? Are they able to do this just by using revenue from the tax?)

Even if it was only the food.

Looking at the ingredients they have used. Numerous spices had been used without holding back.

No matter how much one said it was their custom at welcoming people, this is too extravagant for the sake of welcoming an upstart Baron.

(Maybe, this is something normal for them? If that is the case then...)

Looking at the Earl's wife's clothes, it was such extraordinary luxurious.

Rather than regarding their welcome as something extravagant, what if their living standard that was simply high.

(No, that is impossible... With only tax, such luxury cannot be maintained... That's means...)

Ryouma was unable to conclude an answer. Because he only has a little information about them. But if Ryouma think about it, he can imagine where this all came from...

(I have to consider all the reports everyone has gathered after this is over...)



“Oh. It seems like you only ate a little, does the food not match your taste?”

After drinking a bit of wine, the Earl spoke to Ryouma who has kept silent without eating much of his food.

“I'm sure it was because he's too tired due to the long journey, Dear. Were the meat dishes too heavy for your stomach? Anna. Please give Baron-sama the cold fruits. I'm sure Baron-sama would like it.”

According to the Earl's wife words, one of the maids brings the fruit that was in a golden container filled with ice.

“Please excuse me. I'm sorry for the trouble.”

After saying that, Ryouma ate the cold orange.

He was actually just thinking of something, but he has no intention of correcting the Earl's misunderstanding.

“As expected, you look tired... I do want to hear your story as the person who helped to end the civil war but... But I guess it can't be helped? Since usually to reach here, one needs to ride a horse for half a month.”

“Dear! That's rude... I'm sure it was because of mental fatigue due to suddenly being appointed as noble... Am I right? Baron-sama.”

Yuria's words are filled with concern for Ryouma

“Indeed... Suddenly I was given a territory, to be honest as a commoner it was very confusing...”

Ryouma answered her briefly while carries a piece of beef meat into his mouth.

“Is that so? I heard Mikoshiba-dono is a person with excellent wisdom. I will help you whenever you need help. And since our territories are next to each other, we should help each other in times of need... Oh? Was the food not good?”

The Earl looks suspiciously at Ryouma who chewed the beef meat slowly and carefully

“No, it's just that this uses salt more than I thought... Back at the royal capital, the salt in the dishes tastes quite thin. That's why I was wondering.”

Just like spice, salt was very precious in this world.

At any rate, in this world salt is fundamental to someone livelihood, and there are only two ways to obtain it, either making a field for drying salt or dig up rock salt.

If one's territory is facing the sea, then they won't have to worry about it, but Earl Salzberg's territory should not have any land facing the sea.

If that the case then, either they found rock salt, or transported the salt from another place.



“Hahahaha... I guess those who have accustomed to the light taste from the royal capital would feel surprised.”

Ryouma interject the Earl words.

His purpose is to jolt them and blurt out their secret.

“There shouldn’t have been any parts of this territory that touched the sea... Did you find a rock salt vein?”

“No, in fact— yes that's right... We've found a large rock salt vein in recent years”

The Earl's wife interrupted the Earl's answer with smile.....

“Hou... That's very enviable...”

Ryouma responded to the wife’s answer with a smile as well.

There's no need for Ryouma to push for the answer here.

(Salt huh?... I guess it is worth investigating...)

Ryouma swallowed the beef inside his mouth while having such thought.

After that, nothing dramatic happens, and the talk proceeds normally, Ryouma and the Earl have succeeded in establishing friendly relations.

Both of them talked while drinking wine, and the Earl's wife also joined the conversation occasionally.

They did not show any arrogance as nobles, and welcomed Ryouma from the beginning to the end.

After finishing their talk the Earl asks Ryouma to stay in the mansion which he accepts.

Ryouma entered the room which the maid guided him to.

A room filled with types of furniture that show craftsmanship with a great deal of

effort to make. Both the curtains and the sheets are made by using silk. There are some paintings and vases around the room.

The luxury was comparable to that of a first-class hotel.

(Just how much would all this be worth if I sold it?)

Ryouma muttered those words while lying down on the bed.

This room alone is filled with mountain of treasures. Then the thought of how much money one needs to develop a territory crosses his mind.

(This is a proof that they have economic power huh? But as far as I know, according to the documents I've checked in the library at the royal capital, they should have no major product though...?)

He can't understand the Earl and his wife's attitude either.

Looking at the outside, they look like a friendly couple, but one can't be sure how they actually feel inside.

\*Konkon\*

While Ryouma was in deep thought the sound of someone knocking the door brought him back to reality.

"Baron-sama... May I enter?"

A faint voice of a young woman can be heard.

"Come in... I didn't lock the door."

"Please excuse me..."

Following Ryouma's words, the door was opened and a maid stepped inside.

"Does the Earl call me?"

“E-Emm... The madam... To Baron-sama...”

Looking at the appearance of the maid that came in, Ryouma is able to guess what had happened.

The attire that covered the maid's body is a sexy baby doll lingerie. Under that, one can see alluring pink panty and bra.

Looking at her shoulders quivering occasionally, one can immediately understand that she desperately endured something.

“If I said I do not need it, will you get in trouble?”

When she heard Ryouma's words, the color of despair appeared on her expression.

“Ah! E-Emm... T-This is... My first time doing this... U-Umm... I-I'll do my best for Baron-sama... A-Am I no good...?”

It might be because she was being ordered, but one can see her determination and eagerness.

Who can turn down a girl that already said that much with such a reddened face?

“Very well... Come here.”

Ryouma called out to her as gently as possible so as not to frighten her.

Of course, Ryouma is not someone with an abundance of experience when it comes to women.

However, he can't let himself show a boorish attitude by rejecting her, and there's also his honor as a man.

He grabs the maid's hand.

“Yes...”

Hearing the maid's powerful reply, Ryouma brings her body closer towards him.

The candlelight on the bedside disappeared and darkness dominated the room.

# Chapter 4

## Towards The Peninsula 4

*7th day, 8th month, the year 2812. Western Continent Calendar.*

“Geez, did we really have to welcome him like that?”

While drinking black tea, Earl Salzberg spat out dissatisfied words. And his wife was sitting in front of him while listening to him

The figure of the person who had welcomed Ryouma full of smiles has gone, replaced with a dissatisfied expression.

His face now shows the arrogance and contempt for commoners.

“Let's see... He did embrace the maid, for now, do you want to hear the result?”

Hearing she said that with a smile on her face, the Earl scowled at her in irritation.

“I don't need it! I laid my eyes first on that girl you know that right? Yet, why did you give her over to that upstart!”

It was natural for the Earl to get upset, after all the maid girl he aimed at was given to someone else.

“Isn't it fine? There are a lot of other maids you have here... Besides, you will just get bored of her after one month, no?”

“This and that are different matters! Even if I get bored and throw her away, I can't stand giving my things to someone else! Furthermore, she's a girl that I've not yet laid my hands on, you know that? Geez, and she was that pretty!”

Even if the Earl expresses his wrath, nothing can be done now.



Yuria feels disgusted but does not show it on her face.

(\*Sigh\*... I wonder why this man's habits are so terrible... He can get as many prostitutes or slaves as he wants, but he always seeks out innocent girls that have little to no experience... Besides, he will undoubtedly sell them to the slave trader after embracing them in bed once or twice...)

She looked at her husband who only likes virgin girls with cold eyes.

However, she tried her best to hide her true emotions.

In order for her to keep living, she needs Earl Salzberg.

After the Earl complained for a while longer, his mind seems to have calmed down.

He took a deep breath and relaxed his body deep into the sofa.

"Well, whatever... I have no interest in a used woman that has been touched by commoners... However, why did you tell him about the mine? Won't that create suspicions instead?"

His eyes that had been previously clouded by lust turned sharp.

Although he is the worst type of human, in regards to being a ruler and commander he was someone excellent.

If he was not like that then he wouldn't be able to maintain the territory and Zalda Kingdom would have succeeded in invading the country.

"I guess that might be the impression the other party would get... But, the other party had no intentions of believing our story to begin with... If he felt interested with the salt, he will definitely check it himself. If that is the case then there's no meaning hiding it, no? To be honest, he might actually stop checking it instead."

"Fuh... I wonder if he thinks that far? Besides, how did you know that? He was just a former mercenary who has some little achievement during the civil war you know? How is he going to investigate where the salt came from? Isn't he someone that is only good at fighting?"

From Earl Salzberg's viewpoint, Ryouma looks like your ordinary good guy.

Listening to his wife advice, The Earl welcomed him with the highest hospitality, but inside, he was actually looking down at Ryouma.

(Just from looking at his body build I can see that he is a good fighter... But that face, I can't see any trace of intellect from it...)

The Earl can only see Ryouma as someone calm and good-natured, the Earl couldn't detect any aura that indicated intellectual capabilities from him.

For the Earl, good-natured man represents the weakness of one's heart, while being calm is an equivalent of having no ambitions.

Based on Ryouma's appearance, Earl Salzberg concluded that Ryouma was only good at fighting in battles.

"Certainly he does not look like a resourceful man. But, I don't think that is true... Absolutely."

"Hmph... The rumors might say that, but what is your proof? I think he was just someone who curried some favor into Elena Steiner though?"

Maybe he felt dissatisfied towards his wife's opinion, but the Earl clicked his tongue while talking about his own opinion...

"I don't think that Elena-sama would do something like that though..."

"Fuh... Well, forget about that... So? About that girl whom you told to accompany him, she did manage to get some information right?"

Answering the question his wife shook her head. Seeing that, the Earl feels irritated.

"There's no way he's going to talk about something so suddenly... Last night, he seems to have only embraced her... Next time, I will tell him to take the girl with him. Well, hearing from the report, that girl seems to not mind being his possession, thus I don't think she's going to refuse."

From the maid that Ryouma embraced, Yuria had received a report of what they both talked about last night.

(Well he sounds like someone who's kind toward women... And most men would usually open their mouth after sharing a cup and bed with women.)

She thought of that while looking at her husband sarcastically.

“Geez, to think that I have to shows such behavior toward an upstart... It's really troublesome... And this all is because of that foolish princess huh?”

“It is not foolish Princess, but a foolish Queen. She has been crowned as the new queen of the Rozeria Kingdom just the other day after all.”

It seems like the image of Lupis being a foolish queen has been confirmed.

It was a word that would cause them to lose their life, but for the couple, that was their common view regarding her.

“To give him the Wortenia Peninsula... It would only cause us more troubles!”

“Well, you can complain as much as you want... Right now, we have to watch that man, making sure he's not going to do anything unnecessary...”

The Earl's wife gives him advice while ignoring the Earl's complaint.

Apparently, in this household, the one who holds the real power is the wife.

“I guess you're right... At worst...”

“Have you calmed down now? In any case, the monsters within the peninsula will be happy that he is coming there...”

The Earl shows a cold smile after hearing his Wife's words.



“Young master! You seemed to be having fun last night...”

The middle-aged man sitting on the coach spoke up.

Following after the way Bolts addressed Ryouma, the bunch from the [Red Lion] have started calling him young master.

After being involved with' the civil war together, they all have become good friends with each other.

“Hnn? How did you know that Mike?”



They are currently heading back towards the Inn from the Earl's mansion. Since they have a lot of time, they rode the carriage slowly.

And as soon as they left the mansion, Mike starts talking with Ryouma.

“Oh, I just so happened to hear about it when I talked with the workers at the mansion!”

“Did Bolts order you to do that?”

“Yes... I was told to get as much information from the workers at the mansion as possible.”

Mike answered Ryouma's question while stroking his beard.

“As expected of Bolts... He's fast...”

“True... Well, Nee-san is strong when it comes to battle, but she's weak when it comes to backdoor scheming... With that being the case master Bolts has to cover for her in that regard...”

Among Lione's [Red Lion] mercenary group, Mike is ranked right in the middle.

He was a dexterous person who can do almost any work.

This time, he was given the work of Ryouma's escort.

“Honestly, I never thought that we would stay at the Earl's house just like that...”

“Well... Thanks to that I felt creeped out by how they welcomed me...”

“Me as well... Though they did not send me some woman. The alcohol and food are not something that is usually served to the servants... And the bedroom was really great too.”

“You too huh?”

“Indeed, To be honest... I also feel creeped out by it.”

Hearing Mike's words Ryouma nodded his head lightly and closes his eyes.

Both of them felt the same thing when they stayed at the Earl's mansion.



“I wonder, why did they go that far?”

After being silent for a while, Ryouma throw some questions toward Mike.

“Well, I don't have a smart head like young master or master Bolts after all...”

With those words as the beginning, Mike begins to speak about how he felt.

“I feel like they might want something from young master, or they want the young master to leave the city as fast as possible...”

“I want you to go out, but I don't want us to be hostile to each other huh?... I guess that's possible.”

There's also the possibility that Lupis pulled some strings behind the scene.

For Lupis, she can't rest easy unless Ryouma has arrived at the peninsula after all.

It is easy to understand if she asked Earl Salzberg to let Ryouma enter Wortenia peninsula without any hindrance.

(Either way, what option do I have in response to all of this?... I guess it's useless to think about this now. I need some information first. I should wait until Bolts and Genou presented their report first...)

“And to even provide such hospitality toward me a servant, that means...”

“There's something under the table huh...”

“Indeed...”

Mike agrees with Ryouma while nodded his head.

“By the way Mike! You didn't tell Laura and her sister about what had happened last night right?”

Ryouma switched the topic. At that time, since he doesn't know the intentions of the Earl, he has to do what he needs to do. But right now, the most important thing is to

stop Mike blabbing his mouth.

Hearing Ryouma's question, Mike shows a stiff smile.

“Well, let's see... When I told them that young master is having fun last night... Uwaaah, those ladies immediately went into a fit of anger you know?”

Because of how underdeveloped this world civilization, sexual activities are one of the few forms of entertainment that exist.

Of course, as a mercenary Ryouma also had experience going into the red light district.

*(TLN: There you have it, Ryouma is not a virgin when he embrace the maid)*

“Oi! Tell me the truth! I don't know why, but somehow I know that they are definitely going to kill me, you know?!”

Hearing Mike joking answer, Ryouma instinctively raise his voice.

“Well, isn't that obvious? Besides, the young master should have noticed those young ladies feeling right?”

Mike spoke those words as if he was an elder speaking with his son.

“W-Well, yeah...”

Ryouma respond to him with a short answer.

There's no need to tell Mike in detail. Ryouma fully understands the sisters feelings.

“If that is the case, young master should understand, no? Those young ladies also want to be embraced by young master. That is those two's deepest desire.”

After Ryouma was summoned into this world, he saved the two sisters. It's been over 8 months since then.

The three of them have acted together all the time. It is no surprise such emotions

were born between them.

Ryouma himself was also aware that they are both women.

“I know that, but...”

“Did you feel bothered that one day you might leave them when you got back to your original world?”

Regarding his circumstance, Ryouma had already explained them to the [Red Lion] mercenaries.

It was because they had questioned him regarding Genou’s question if he was someone from “hinomoto”

“Well... Yeah, that too... I think I might lack determination too...”

It was unusual for Ryouma to be vague with his words.

He understands that he can't go back to his original world, and his mind also understands that he will have to remain in this world. But, his heart can't accept it yet. He still unable to forget the friends and family he left in Japan.

Although one can say that Ryouma is someone who's merciless, he is a human being too. It was natural for him to feel troubled with such feelings.

(To embrace those two... I need to be prepared... To stay in this world, together...)

If it was women who work in the nightlife business, then he does not have to feel bothered. Since money settled that.

But in case of the Marfisto sisters, they show affection toward Ryouma without expecting anything from him.

To embrace such women...

There's no way Ryouma would be able to return to his original world alone and leave them behind.

“Well... As the young master knight, I will say this... Since young master has accepted the territory, doesn't that mean young master already decided what to do?”

“Well, since I've involved everyone... I can't really go back to my original world now...”

This was fate. If Ryouma left this world and went back to his original world, what's going to happen to Lione and the others?

(If there's a way for me to get back... I...)

He already has the answer. As well as Ryouma's resolution...

“Well, as young master's knight I will also keep what happened last night a secret... But in exchange, buy me some drinks next time, deal?”

Mike said that while laughing.

“Fine, you can drink as much as you want!”

Mike changed the subject because he was being considerate toward Ryouma.

And Ryouma who knew that responded in kind.

(Everything is up to me huh?...)

# Chapter 5

## Towards The Peninsula 5

*Day 8th, 8th Months, the Year 2812, Western Continental Calendar.*

“Welcome back... Just like Bolt's predicted, you stayed at the Earl's house last night...”

“Indeed... It was a very grandiose welcome you know?”

Genou picked up Ryouma at the inn's entrance, after receiving his cloak, Genou folded it.

“Hou... That's amazing... There's a possibility they have some shoddy intention by doing that...”

Genou lightly answered Ryouma's words.

Although his voice did not change.

Ryouma understood what that meant.

“Indeed... There must be something behind the scenes... Genou, you don't show any surprise... Did you already find some information?”

“Indeed... I will begin my report later. Everyone is already waiting inside milord's room”

Hearing Genou's reply, Ryouma shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh come on... You guys are really talented people huh... To think you guys already finished your investigation... If that is the case then, just hurry up and tell me what you know.”

After returning from the Earl's house he doesn't even have time to take a breather.

(Geez, since when have I become such busy person like this... But, I guess I have no

choice huh?... Then again, I have a bad feeling about this...)

The results of their investigation might be related to their survival. With that in mind, Ryouma steeled his heart.



“Well then boy, I guess I should start with my report...”

The moment Ryouma sits on his chair, Lione who was already waiting for him handed some parchments to him.

“Nee-san? This is?”

“It was the list of mercenaries that I have interviewed!”

Hearing Bolts question, Lione answered him in a relaxed manner.

“This, all of them...?”

It is reasonable for Bolts to make such surprised voice. The parchments size is similar to that of A4 paper, in it, there are mercenaries names and their ranks which Lione had interviewed.

There are 10 parchments above the table, enough to make you think it was completed by two people...

And inside of each those parchments are the description of almost 50 mercenaries.

She seemed to have hired them using the pretext of recruiting them as a member of Red Lion mercenary group.

“Not just their names and ranks... You also write their weapon specialty, quest achievement percentage, and origin... There’s even Lione-san's impression of each individual written... To think you would manage to do this in just a few days...”

Ryouma read Lione's impression of the individuals written on the parchment carefully.



Beginning with something simple such as how they communicate and talk, how they make eye contact. Their individual behavior is written in detail.

“Well, the more skilled people we get, the easier it will be for us to sleep at night... Furthermore, we can't have people that are unable cooperate with others, with that in mind, for every 50 people I've interviewed, around 10 of them worth considering for employment... Those people are the ones whose names I have circled...”

Just like she said, some of the names have circles on them.

“Hmm? I understand about the circled names, but, what about the names that have lines crossing over them?”

Examining the parchments Ryouma noticed that there are 3 names that have line crosses over it.

If the one with a circle means worth considering, and those with nothing on it means people that are not worth mentioning, then what about the names with line crosses over it?

“Ah that... They are the troublesome one...”

Lione speaks in a vague manner.

“So? What's the problem?”

“The black wolf Yohan... The red clay Celes... And the long distance arrow Riui... All of them are first-rate...”

Together with Ryouma's question, Bolts read the name of the individuals one by one.

“Are they famous?”

“Indeed... The people who do not know them would be a novice who have registered just yesterday.”

“That means they are people that one would hear here and there huh?”

“That's right... But these guys are lone wolf mercenaries... They are the type of people who ignore the surrounding and push toward the front line...”

Answering Laura's question, Bolts replied while grinning.

“I see... I guess I can understand Lione-san's concern...”

“Indeed... This is unnatural...”

Ryouma and Genou nodded to each other.

“Right... Those three are indeed very skilled. In a one on one fight, it would be hard to win against them... But those who believe their skill is the best usually hard to cooperate, not to mention they are all the type of guys who always stick to the money, which means they will accept dirty works without hesitation... To be honest I highlighted them because I feel suspicious...”

“They came here to gather information regarding us is it?”

Lione silently nodded her head in responding to the question.

“Indeed... If we consider who pulled the strings behind the scene. Then it would be either, Lupis or Earl Salzberg...”

“No. Those two are indeed formidable, but, you should also consider if they are actually being sent by another country.”

Genou voiced another possibility.

Certainly, since Wortenia peninsula is close to the border, they might be a spy sent by some nation who wants to invade the Rozeria Kingdom.

“Another country huh... Then that means it would be impossible for us to narrow it down huh?”

What they know about these three people is that they are all suspicious.

There's also the possibility of them wanting to join just because of their whimsical mind.

“For now, I told them that we will decide for an answer at later date... Should I refuse them?”

Lione is someone who likes the least dangerous route. She herself was not sure about her judgment regarding this.

However, Genou voiced his disagreement.

“I don't think that was such a good idea... If they turn out to be just like what we've suspected and refused them here, the mastermind might send others in their place. It would be lucky if Lione-dono notices them next time, but there's the possibility that we miss them as well. It would be better for us to accept them, then assign people to monitor them.”

“I guess so... I think that is the best option... But then, who's going to monitor them? It's not like we can disclose this matter to all [Red Lion]'s members... And I can't give this task to Genou or Sakuya either... Since they already have a job to do...”

Ryouma said while groaning.

(Should I inform everyone? No, that would be too direct... They might realize that they're being watched...)

It was clear what Ryouma's problem is. And that problem is the lack of hands. While being small in numbers, they have many things to do.

This causes Ryouma a headache.

“If that is the case, do you want to draw some people from my clan?”

“Genou's clan?”

“Indeed... Right now, what milord needs the most is people under milord command... Furthermore, those whom milord can put his trust to... If it's my clan's people, then they will definitely meet your expectation.”

“The reward... The same as last time?”

“That is good enough...”

Genou nodded his head responding to Ryouma's question.

“Fine then... Lione-san. Put some of Genou's clan members into the mercenary group. Let them monitor those people. Is that okay?”

“Alright! I will personally create their personal history so that they won't be found easily...”

Lione said those words while nodded her head.

“Alright then, with this, we've solved the problem regarding the mercenaries employment. Please report again if any problems arise... Next, Bolts. How much information did you get regarding the peninsula?”

Ryouma immediately asked Bolts.

“Let's see... Following young master's order, I've gone to the guild looking for some information. But as far as the topography and the current state of the peninsula concerned, there's not much difference from what we've learned. As for monsters and demi-human living there...”

“It was a den isn't it?”

Ryouma sighed deeply.

“Indeed... The information regarding the river and lake I will talk about it later, regarding the detailed information regarding monsters that inhabit the territory. It seems like only high ranked monsters live there, ordinary people won't be able to live easily, and will only become prey for those monsters.”

Saying that Bolts spread out the parchment he had prepared.

“What the hell is this? Most of them are classified as D rank and above!”

Lione screamed as soon as she saw the name of the monsters listed on the parchment.

Of course, that is normal. Looking at the name listed there, it was the names of monsters that rarely being seen.

There are ten categories within the guild ranking system for monsters, from A to E, with S being the most powerful one. And this corresponds to the mercenaries guild rank.

Although individual ability is not necessarily consistent with the guild rank, it is something that can be used as rough indicator. Judging that the monsters inhabiting the Wortenia peninsula are above E. Monsters ranked below E are not the type that cause harm to humans directly.

But those that are ranked above, starting from C, they are the types that would attack villages and towns, not only that some of them would also make a nest near highways and prey upon the people that pass by. Usually, monsters who have done such thing would immediately be given a minimum of rank C. In other words, monster that are classified as 'friendly' are up to D rank.

“Even the ones with E rank... Most of them are the types that cannot be dealt with using magic art...”

“That is true... No wonder the ruler of this kingdom abandoned that land. Like this, if we bring people and create towns, the maintenance cost to defend it will be quite high... Since the knights magic arts will be not much of use, it would be hard to defend... Not to mention, one can't expect profit immediately...”

Bolts and Lione immediately voiced their opinion as battle-hardened mercenaries with a lot of experience fighting against monsters.

They understand the difficulty level of living within the peninsula more than anyone inside the room.

Between human and monsters, there's a huge difference in physical capability. Strength, reflex, endurance. Every human was significantly inferior to them.

As life-form, the human is significantly inferior.

Mercenaries and adventurers acquire skills by training and gain experience to close the gap, but they can't not fill up the gap regarding their physical specifications. Somewhere they will hit a wall where they can't overcome.

But then, humans were able to overcome such wall by creating one thing. And that is

magic art. A technique that the weak human developed to beat the strong monster.

However, the current human has used them to fight against each other. And the magic art ends up as a wall in social status. Which makes it so that even a King can't easily tell ordinary people to learn the magic art.

As a result of that, Wortenia peninsula was being left alone all this time.

“Magic art huh...”

Ryouma have some knowledge about it already. Back when he was trying to return to his original world, he had received some basic education about it from Marfisto sisters. But that does not mean he is already able to use it.

Even the fastest people who learn it would take around 4 months to be able to use magic art.

When Ryouma was involved with the civil war, he has no time to learn it, and before that, he was busy trying to figure out how to return to his original world.

(Should I hire those who can use magic art only? No, I guess I can't do that. The first problem is it costs too much money. Since the Knights and mercenaries that can use magic art are quite useful their salaries end up high... Then I guess I have no choice other than to teach ordinary people to learn them huh?... But wait, how about making this into an advantage? A place, a country where everyone is able to use magic art... That would become an overwhelming force... Besides, everyone can learn magic art... The problem is who going to teach them? Should I educate the entire member of the mercenary group first? After that, should I invite citizen from another city? No, that would be bad... No lord wants their citizens taken away by other people...)

Ryouma immediately makes calculations inside his mind, but he still can't come up with a good plan.

It was not a problem that he can fix easily.

“Well let's figure out about what to do about this later. Everyone should think about some solutions too... Bolts, continue with the topography information.”

“Understood!”



Responding to Ryouma, Bolts nodded his head.

(Geeez... Problem after problem...)

It was no wonder that Ryouma is having a headache.

This was only the second report he gets, yet it was already this bad.

Coming after this are the reports from Genou and the Marfisto sisters.

(Especially the report from Genou... From how he was talking earlier... I can feel that he has something...)

Ryouma sighed while feeling depressed. But then, there's no other option other than to listen to their report. No matter how harsh their report turns out, reality won't change.

# Chapter 6

## Towards The Peninsula 6

*Western continent calendar August 8, 2812:*

“So, Genou shall I hear your report now?”

Ryouma directed his gaze towards Genou. Only Genou's and the Marfisto sister's reports remained but since Ryouma had a bad feeling about Genou's report he chose to prioritize it over the sisters who were in charge of reporting about the merchants who they should purchase goods from.

However, Genou shook his head.

“No... I will be reporting last... Laura-sama should give their report first.”

There seems to be something wrong.

Ryouma nods his head while feeling doubtful and asks the Marfisto sisters to begin their report.

“Hmm... Fine, there's seems to be some reason for you to say that... Laura, Sara. Please give your report first.”

“Understood... Well then...”

After nodding her head Laura begins her report, the contents of the report dropped Ryouma's optimism to the depths of an abyss.

“In conclusion, most of the business here have strong ties with Earl Salzburg.”

“Strong relationship?”

Ryouma tilted his head due to Laura's words. From her way of saying it, it felt more

than just the ordinary relationship between a lord and merchants.

“Yes, in fact, it is a very close relationship...”

Saying so, Sara spreads out a map on the table.

“This is... The map of Epiroz?”

“Yes, And these red dots represent the places where the merchants conduct their businesses...”

Sara pointed out all the red dots on the map.

There are ten of them. That is the number of shops located in this fortified city of Epiroz.

“Mistel Firm... Rafiel Firm...”

Sara reads the name of the shops written next to the dots.

“All ten of these businesses are united, they are in full control of the economy within Epiroz..... The problem is that the daughter of Mistel firm is the Earl's wife, and Mistel Firm is the acting representative of the coalition.”

“Is that true?”

Ryouma complexion changes. It was natural for him to be surprised.

When he entered Wortenia peninsula, he knew he wouldn't be able to be immediately self-sufficient in terms of food, in other words he had to temporarily rely on Epiroz city for food until he was able to produce enough food for themselves.

Although monsters can be eaten, hunting was not an option for him as a majority of the monsters within his territory are inedible. It was a precarious situation since food and water was not something they could easily disregard.

If he were to get on the bad side of the Earl's wife's family whom has large influence over the economy... it was something that even Ryouma did not want to imagine.

“Yes... To steadily purchase more than a certain amount of food, there's no choice but to have trade negotiation with one of these ten shops... But the problem is the Earl's wife is the daughter of the leader of this business coalition...”

Laura cut her words short, because even without saying it everyone understood.

This means Ryouma can't disregard Earl Salzberg no matter how small the matter was since if the Earl were to apply pressure on their trades then everything would be over as Ryouma would starve to death in the peninsula.

“It seems like the one who leads Mistel Firm is someone who has big ambition... The representative of the coalition was originally Christoph Firm. However, due to the daughter who is married to the Earl, Mistel firm seems to have taken over the seat.”

“Well, I guess if one's daughter got married to a nobleman, it was no wonder for them to expand using the influence..... That's good and all, I can understand...”

Everyone nodded their head hearing Ryouma's words.

Sure that was not an uncommon story. It even happens back at his original worlds.

“But still... Do nobles in this country usually take daughters of merchants as their wives??”

When it comes to social status, Merchants are just a commoner. No matter how much money they have, they still a commoner.

Yet, one of their daughters manages to become a noble wife. It is natural for Ryouma to feel puzzled over it, since the daughter did not become the noble's concubine or mistress, but rather the legal wife.

“I've investigated regarding that as well... But it seems like the Earl's finances is under considerable pressure...”

“Fuuh... That's means he borrowed some money? In the first place, why did his finance deteriorate so much, could it be due to military expenses?”

The Earl found himself with enough financial problems to make him marry the daughter of a merchant... such a move could be considered quite bold among nobles.

The question is why the Earl suffers such a crisis...

“Yes... The Earl needed a big budget for his military because of his territory near the border, and countermeasures against the monsters that occasionally invade from the peninsula.”

Everyone present nodded in understanding.

The military is always something that cost a very considerable sum of money to maintain.

It does not produce anything, but always consumed a lot of resources. It was a gluttonous monster called 'The Military'.

The stronger the military becomes, the bigger the budget they needed.

Starting with the soldier's salary all the way down to their armaments as well as continuous supplies to maintain a soldier's health such as food and medical supplies.

Besides, that is the story of a 'normal' situation. When such military enter a war, they will consume even more supplies. No matter how much money is poured into them, it's never enough.

But even with that, one should always prepare a budget for the military. That is because the military is the one who protects the people.

If a nobleman was entrusted to a territory nearing the border then the responsibility becomes much heavier, it was not unusual for the Earl to be facing financial difficulties in such a situation.

“Well, I guess that's natural? After all his territory is bordered with Zalda, and not only that, he also needs to be vigilant when it comes to the monsters living within the peninsula.”

“According to the documents I've investigated... It seems that there's a large scale of monsters invasion once every ten years.”

Lione nodded in agreement with Bolts statement.

“And as you can see, this land is not suitable for agricultural development. A land that

does not have any specialty... can be called a poor land.”

“Then what about the salt? Yesterday when I talked with them, apparently they have found a rock salt vein.”

In respond to Genou's words, Ryouma gave out a question.

Considering their attire when welcoming him yesterday, they don't seem to have any financial difficulty.

Although there's also the possibility that they done something like that to protect their pride, but there is a limit even for things like that.

Whether it be their attire or meals, the Earl indeed looks like he does not have any trouble with money. The dishes atop the table was also not something ordinary.

Moreover, those dishes also used a lot of spices. If he was really in trouble with money, he would be unable to do that.

That's why he suspects it might be due to the rock salt vein. Although the salt price is not that high, but because it is needed for daily life, the demand is constant. If the Earl really in the possession of it, he should be able to recover from his financial situation.

“No... There are no rock salt vein within Earl's territory.”

Genou shook his head while showing a meaningful smile.

(What does that mean? If there's no rock salt vein how did he manage to handle his finance? Does he have some kind of other industries?)

Ryouma thought of the various possibilities.

(If he has other resources, why did his wife lied to me and told me that they have rock salt vein?...)

A good way to lie is by mixing some truth in with said lie.

It is surprisingly difficult to tell something that is 100% a lie. Because in reality, a 100% lie is something that always easy to crumbles.

“Ah! Perhaps...”

Sara suddenly raises her voice.

“What's wrong Sara? Did you find something?”

When Sara nodded her head when Laura asked the question, then she turns her eyes toward Genou.

“Perhaps... The Earl does not have rock salt vein within his territory? But it existed within the Wortenia peninsula?”

““Ha?!””

Everyone raised a surprised voice.

Meanwhile, only Genou showed a subtle smile.

“Ah, it seems the lady noticed. Just like she said, there's a rock salt vein within the territory. He kept it secret from the kingdom...”

It was something unexpected, but if Genou is the one who said it then it is possible...

“Did the Earl actually embezzle the rock salt vein in the peninsula without permission from the kingdom? Even if it was an abandoned territory, that was a very huge catch... Won't he get executed if the kingdom found out about it?”

Before Wortenia peninsula was passed to Ryouma, it was in possession of the Royal family. Even if the royal family left the territory untouched, it was still a bad idea to use the land's resources without permission as if the royal family were to find out about this, the Earl's head would definitely roll and not to mention those who carry his blood.

He was crossing a dangerous path and had brought his entire family with him.

“Is that how it is? Damn it! And here I was wondering why they were so friendly like



that... He really wants me to quickly step into the peninsula and die huh?"

Ryouma manage to understand the Earl's intention from hearing all the reports.

"He does not want to immediately kill me because the royal government will come and investigate..."

"The reason why he had welcomed milord with such warm welcome is to indicate that if something were to happen, it was the fault of the monsters within the peninsula, thus the central won't suspect anything..."

"He wants us to become food for the monsters huh..."

Ryouma's eyes turn sharp...

"What should we do? If it was me or Sakuya, we both could take the Earl's head immediately..."

"I wonder about that? I think we will actually lose a lot by doing that?"

"Hou? Does Sara-dono think the opposite? May I hear the reason?"

Sara seems to disagree with Genou's suggestion of assassination.

"Although assassination is an effective method to erase the Earl's motive, but the stability of Epiroz is very important for us to survive in the peninsula... If the assassination succeeds, the evil hands of the Earl might disappear, but who's going to rule this land after that? Someone under direct command of Queen Lupis would come then..."

Instead of killing a wolf, the result might actually invite a tiger.

Since Lupis is very cautious when it comes to Ryouma, no one can predict what kind of move she's going to make at that time.

Such claim was reasonable.

"Fumu... I can understand Sara-dono's concern. I guess we can regard my suggestion as a last resort."

Genou nodded his head in agreement with Sara's claim.

"I guess so... Even if we took over the rock salt vein, we still do not have any business channels to sell it... I guess I should turn blind eye until I can pick a fight against him huh..."

"I guess, that is the right move... Although it is regrettable, since that is a very good source of income. Even if we took over the vein from the Earl, Epiroz merchants will refuse to make trade with us..."

"I guess I agree with that... Since the Earl and the head of the business coalition are close, he can use his influence to put pressure on the coalition."

Even if Ryouma was to take back the rock salt vein, who wouldn't be able to turn into money. It would be a different matter if there were other towns nearby to trade with but to perform trades between the Wortenia peninsula and places besides Epiroz one would need a sea trade route.

In the future, Ryouma planned to be able to do maritime trade but in their present situation it was not something he could do.

"Then why don't we leave the Earl alone for now?"

"Leave him alone huh?"

Toward Laura's suggestion Ryouma frowned.

There's no lord that would feel pleased when someone is stealing from their territory.

"Well, we can't bring this matter to the royal family either. The Earl will be executed if we told them. And the result would be the same as us assassinating the Earl..."

"I guess you're right..."

There was also another problem, even if it was good to kill the earl and methods beside assassination existed to end his life it would invite princess Lupis's intervention.

"That's right, that's why we should give up the rock salt vein to the Earl, and ask him

to help us in return... In the meantime, we should consolidate our power, in order to crush him in the future... Don't you agree?"

Laura's plan might be not the best plan, but it was a very realistic one.

The question is whether or not the Earl would accept such proposal.

"I agree with Laura-dono."

"I guess I have to agree too... That was the most realistic plan... We should take a step back for a while and increase our power..."

"I agree as well..."

Lione and the other agrees one after another.

"Not bad... With that, we can earn some time, but the problem is, whether the Earl is willing to accept this proposal... No, I guess he can't make a move on us huh? Since he doesn't want to attract a lot of attention of the royal family. If I the feudal lord of the territory give him the official permission, it will reduce any unnecessary fear in him... I guess that is an advantage for him... There's a high possibility that the Earl may accept the proposal... Though it is really regrettable... But then again, even if I hold on to the vein, I don't have any means to make a money out of it yet either...)

Ryouma hardened his determination.

First of all, he planned to increase his power, not just military power but also the economical and political power of his land.

"Very well... We will buy some time and build our power first."

Following Ryouma decision, everyone nodded their head.

"Well then, we've already made our decision. First, what should we do?"

In response to Ryouma's question, Laura voices her opinion.

"First, we should search for a trustworthy merchant... We need to purchase food and other supplies, not to mention we're going to need someone who we can sell the salt

to in the future... My aim is Christoph firm, the one who lost their influence within the coalition due to Mistel firm..."

"I also agree with my sister. Since the other eight companies are under Mistel firm's umbrella, dealing with them might be bad news. And we heard that Christoph firm has been trying its best not to get influenced by the other firms, which means there's room for negotiations..."

As expected... These two seems to have thoroughly examined every single firm.

Ryouma who realize that can only be thanks to his excellent subordinates who support him. Everyone has been doing their best to help Ryouma. They pledge their loyalty to Ryouma despite him being just a youngster.

(Earl... I will let you do what you want for now, but... I will definitely get it back!)

Ryouma's heart feels satisfied. And he immediately steeled his determination.

He cannot lose. Because his defeat would result in the death of his companions.

# Chapter 7

## Towards The Peninsula 7

*Day 9th, 8th Months, the Year 2812, Western continent calendar.*

1km east of Epiroz city, one can see a rampart nearly 10 meters high. Seeing the height of the wall being almost taller than the royal capital's walls signifies the importance of this location.

Trade within this city is also flourishing. The width of the main street is around 20m, which makes it easy for people to move around.

One can see a lot of wagons come and go on the road.

All the shops lined up facing the street also look magnificent, many people can be seen going in and out.

The time right now is 15:00(EN: 3:00 pm). One can say it is the perfect time to do some business, which explains the crowded and vibrant street.

Meanwhile, the building Ryouma was looking at is nestled quietly as if it were a building from a different neighborhood.

The size of the building is much larger compared the surrounding shops. The store itself was built with stone.

The signboard of the shop also uses fine oak. It is a perfect example of a store that combines tradition and formality. However, the shop was empty, there were no customers.

While looking at the fine detail, the building has something like dirt marks here and there.

“Here huh... I see, they really are being treated like an enemy huh?”

Ryouma compares the shops around him to the one in front of him.

While the surrounding ones have a lot of people coming and going, only the Christoph firm has no patrons entering or leaving. It's as if there's an invisible wall between them.

The shop itself faces the main street, and is also close the eastern wall, which should make it normal for it to have a lot of customers.

However, the reality is different.

Judging from where the shop is located, one can say this is a considerably unnatural phenomenon. People are ignoring the existence of this store as if someone's malice was covering this shop.

"Yes, due to the Mistel firm's constant harassment, this shop's customers have dropped severely... They are unable to endure the pressure from the Mistel firm, and are pulling away from this one, the Christoph firm."

"As a result of our investigation, there are hardly any large clients left... Even with that, the chairman was able to keep the company standing, which can be attributed to the chairman's only daughter, Simone Christoph."

Hearing the Marfisto sisters' words, it was clear that they had a firm grasp on the Christoph firm's situation...

"Hoo... Despite being a woman, she's a tough one, huh?"

After nodding in response to Ryouma's words, Laura continues her explanation...

"Indeed... She has been dealing with all the business administration matters since her father was bedridden."

"Bedridden eh? Is it because of illness?"

"From Sara's investigation of the neighborhood, she heard that the father has grown senile rapidly after having his post as the chairman of the business alliance taken away by his rival."

One can say such a story is common for people who usually work on the front line of business.

Perhaps, the heavy pressure from when he worked as the business alliance chairman suddenly disappearing caused him to break down.

But, that is only a rumor. To confirm that, one has to ask the person in question himself.

However, whether the father is sick or not, it is actually true that his daughter, Simone, has taken over the business.

“I see... She needs to break away from the Mistel firm, and her father is currently not able to be relied upon... Uhuh, there's a lot of room for negotiation.”

Ryouma muttered those words to himself while showing a cold smile.

What he wants is a handy piece to use in his hand. Right now Ryouma's situation is overwhelmingly disadvantageous, and he would not care about Simone's current circumstance either.

Although by doing what he is about to do is like taking advantage of Simone's weakness.

“Well then Ryouma-sama. It's almost time.”

Sara said those words, then she opened the shop's door.

Together with the sisters, Ryouma stepped into the building.



The entrance hall spreads before Ryouma's eyes.

The bright red carpet that Ryouma stepped onto was really soft. Although people call this place a “shop”, it seems like the building itself was only used for business negotiations.

The furniture inside the premises stood comparison with ones in the Earl's house.

If there's a difference then it may be the sense of unity between the furniture.

It's not about cheap or expensive, but one can feel the rich feeling it gives just by seeing how they arranged the furniture.

Although the Earl's luxurious house feels right, compared to this place, the latter has



a more refined feeling.

“Welcome... Your Excellency, Mikoshiba Ryouma. Excuse me but please enter and rest in the waiting room, I will immediately notify the chairperson that Mikoshiba-sama has arrived,” saying that the old man that welcomed Ryouma bowed his head.

The man's age is around mid 40's. Tanned skin can be seen in contrast to his white shirt. His smile gives off the feeling of a gentle person. However, the light from his eyes gives the feeling that he's different from your ordinary gentleman. And his body somehow exudes the feeling of a man of the sea.

“I understand. I will wait... Can you guide me to the room then?”

Following Ryouma's request, the man guided Ryouma to the room.

“Excuse me, Your Excellency. May I hold custody of the sword that you are holding right now? The two people over there as well please.”

“I have to leave my sword?!”

Together with Laura's rising voice, Sara put her hand on the hilt of her sword.

The way the man request them is indeed somewhat rude.

There's no reason for a merchant to disarm a nobleman who is about to become their customer.

“I am sorry for troubling you, but this is one of our company's rules since everyone here is about to meet with the chairperson...”

His words are kind of polite, but his body indicates that he's not going to negotiate... That is the impression Ryouma and the others felt.

But Ryouma also felt that it was not just because this is the rule of their company, he felt there's something more to it...

(I wonder if there's a reason for this... Is it because they are wary of possible assassins?)

I guess there's no choice if it was something like that. After all, in their point of view, a friend of the Earl is coming to visit them...)

For the people of the firm, Ryouma and Earl Salzberg are from the same stratum, they both belong to the aristocracy.

They don't care for the truth... Since for Simone and the others, Ryouma is someone from the Earl's faction.

“Very well... Laura, Sara leave it at that!”

Following Ryouma's words, the sisters removed their swords and handed them over to the man.

For the sisters, they felt anxious to be within someone's territory without a means to protect themselves. However, since it was an order from their master, they have no choice.

“I see... I will also hand this over, please take care of it.”

Ryouma handed over his sword and a bag that was hanging on his waist.

“Hou... This is...”

The man narrowed his eyes when he inspected the content of the bag.

Inside, there was Ryouma's chakram. A throwing weapon with considerable power. However, it was not a weapon a nobleman would usually carry.

Then, the man's gaze was directed toward Ryouma for a moment, and only after a few seconds had passed, he averted his eyes. The man immediately continued to guide them.

“Well then... This way, please. I will guide everyone to the second floor.”

Apparently, Ryouma earned a favorable impression by taking the initiative of handing the chakram by himself.

Ryouma nodded his head lightly and followed the man, as he went up the stairs.

“Well then... Please wait here. Shortly, Simone Cristoph will come.”

After guiding Ryouma and the others to their room, the man left.

“Sara, what do you think?”

Ryouma asked the sisters in whispers so that only they would hear.

Since he does not know what kind of secrets are hidden inside this room, he thought of the possibility that someone might eavesdrop.

“He seems to be quite a master... Also, there's something that bothered me about his tanned skin...”

Laura lightly nodded her head agreeing with Sara's words.

The man caught everyone's attention. They did not believe that the man was actually a merchant due to his behavior and the gaze of his eyes.

It was obvious that the man was a martial arts master.

“No matter how I see it, I can feel that he's someone who is familiar with the sea... But, there's no sea within the Earl's territory...”

“Laura's right. I also felt the same... Maybe he was someone from the neighboring town? Or possibly...”

There are several possibilities. However...

“Well, it is no use for us to think about this right now... First of all, we need to finish the talk with Simone.”

\*Kon\*Kon\*

The door was being knocked, waiting for Ryouma's response.

“Is it alright for me to enter?”

A young woman's voice. A calm and gentle voice, yet also giving off a strong feeling from it.

“Please enter.”

After Ryouma said those words, the door was opened, and a single woman was standing at the entrance.

Her chestnut colored hair is carefully tied using a silver hair ornament, The silk dress dyed with blue color giving her a cool image.

“Please excuse me, and thank you for waiting for me. You are Baron Mikoshiba, am I right? I am happy for being graced with this occasion. My name is Simone Christoph, the chairperson, and representative of the Christoph firm.”

「お目通りがかない恐悦に存じます。

私が当クリストフ商会の会長代理、

シモーヌ・クリストフでございます」



She is the daughter of the man who fell from grace.

Her manners and gesture are perfect.

There's dignity and also elegance displayed from how she acted.

(Fuuh... I guess in terms of how she acted, she's equal to the Earl's wife.)

Ryouma compared Simone with the Earl's wife.

Both of them are beautiful. But, the two of them boast a different kind of beauty.

To speak of it, the Earl's wife is a gorgeous woman.

Gorgeous jewels matching her beautiful appearance.

The Earl's wife shows strong self-assertion.

In contrast to her, Simone gives off the feeling of a pure and innocent woman.

Glossy hair and healthy white skin.

Minimal accessories.

She gives off a somewhat discreet and quiet aura.

One might imagine them as a rose and a lily.

However, even with her calm expression, Ryouma could feel that a ferocious beast is hidden underneath.

Especially after she came to this room by herself. Ryouma originally thought that the man from before was going to escort her.

(I guess, this won't end easy huh...)

“Emm... Excuse me?”

Towards Ryouma who was standing silently without saying anything, Simone uttered some words while refraining herself.

“Oh... Please forgive me. My name is Mikoshiba Ryouma. I apologize for suddenly coming like this...”

“My... Please do not mind it... Since Your Excellency is an important customer after all.”

Ryouma made his request to meet just this morning.

Although his visit can be said to be sudden, Simone did not show any unpleasant expression.

She smiles gently.

“I'm thankful for your kind words, despite my sudden visit.”

Ryouma waited for Simone to sit down facing him to begin the talk.

“Oh my, you are being too humble... But to be honest, right now I am not sure if I can satisfy Your Excellency's expectations... You might not know but, my father the chairman of this firm has fallen ill and became unconscious. Therefore, despite being young, I am currently acting as his substitute.”

“Hou... Unconscious huh? I heard that due to the Mistel firm taking the position of the business alliance leadership from him, he has fallen ill, is the rumor true?”

Ryouma provoked her in a sarcastic way, to anger her, and to see his opponent's reactions.

After all, one can guess someone's thoughts just by seeing their attitude.

“Is that so? It seems like Your Excellency knew about that as well, despite having just arrived in the city seven days ago. It seems like Your Excellency has a lot of excellent subordinates. But then I guess that was natural. Thinking about Your Excellency's activities at Irachion, I can see that Your Excellency values information highly. Even for an amateur like me, I was in awe of your strategy back then... For you to be able to perform such a stratagem, I can only see Your Excellency as someone fearsome indeed.”





Simply smiling, Simone said those words while looking at Ryouma with gentle eyes.

She does not show any sign of repressing anger either.

Conversely, she manages to lightly bite Ryouma back.

“Hohou... Knowing about what had happened at Irachion... I guess I can expect that you also know why I have come here?”

Ryouma gazes at Simone with a questioning gaze.

With this world’s low infrastructure, it was hard to get information from somewhere far away.

It is a world without TV, Radio or the Internet. They can only spread information using letters, or rumors that are being spread from one person to another.

Given that, it was important to have the means for spreading information.

And here, Simone knew about how Ryouma manipulated the information before the battle at Irachion.

That indicated she also understood that he did not just simply lead Queen Lupis to her victory.

Such knowledge is not something someone should know unless they had gone to the site and investigated it in detail.

With all this, it was obvious that Simone is not just a mere daughter from a rich family.

“Well now, I wonder about that... I am not completely sure but I guess I understand around half of it. Although I expected, with how resourceful Your Excellency is, you would be able to immediately see through Earl Salzburg intention, but I never expected you to come to my place within a few days after having arrived here. At most, I thought that you would start to seek influence from now on.”

“I see... Then I take it that you understand the situation I'm in?”

Simone does not change her facial expression when she heard Ryouma's question.

“Of course. The matters regarding Her Majesty the Queen, and the matter with Earl Salzburg as well... Oh my, how rude of me! For me to not be serving tea to the customers, someone!”

Saying that she called the maid to serve the tea, as if she were about to have a tea party with her friends.

# Chapter 8

## Towards The Peninsula 8

*Day 9th, 8th Months, the Year 2812, Western continent calendar.*

While gazing at the tea that the maid had prepared, Ryouma narrowed his eyes.

“Please enjoy it. It is made with the specialty tea leaves of Kirantia.”

The high-grade tea leaves were being carefully processed. The mellow fragrance when the tea was being poured from the teapot into the cup entered Ryouma's nose.

Matching with the cookies presented, the way the tea was served was indeed a masterpiece.

“This is... Delicious! The tea leaves are great, but the way you brew it is perfect! Furthermore, it fits perfectly with the sweet cookies... I can tell that the one who prepared all this has reached an expert level.”

Although he could not properly word it like a gourmet enthusiast would, Ryouma's tongue had good taste in general.

There was also the fact that his grandfather was a hobbyist when it came to tea.

Besides, delicious things are delicious no matter who eats or drinks them.

Not only that, the sisters, who tried it, also widened their eyes in amazement.

“Oh, my! Do you understand it? It seems like Baron-sama has a very refined taste.”

Simone smiled with admiration.

“Refined is it? Well, for me, at least I can judge if it's something delicious or not.”

“I see... It seems like the other world is a great place is it not?”

Ryouma desperately suppressed his surprise. He couldn't declare the truth of her words right then.

(This woman... How much does she know?)

"What do you mean?"

Ryouma asked such question without changing his complexion.

"I did not think it was something that needed to be hidden... From the way Baron-sama displays refined conduct, resourcefulness, and ingenuity... It was not something an ordinary commoner should have. And no matter how much I probe, I cannot find anything about your past. There is no information of you before your guild registration. Naturally, such a thing is impossible to happen... Even if I cannot grasp the full knowledge of it, with my intelligence network, I should get at least a little bit of information. Even if the target of such an investigation was a royal family member. Yet, you are different, nothing comes out even after investigating you as deep as I could... It is as if you had appeared in this world all of a sudden... see? Not only that, Baron-sama registered at the guild within Ortomea Empire's capital city. Perhaps, you were summoned by Ortomea? That is what crossed my mind."

"I see... Since you've uncovered that much, I guess there's no point in hiding it."

Ryouma said those words while showing resignation.

(Damn it... This is bad, I guess I have no choice but to kill her... Although I wouldn't want to kill a woman if I had a choice...)

It was not like Ryouma wanted to put on airs. But, he did not have the distorted hobby of happily killing women either.

(But then again... She's good... Her intelligence network that is...)

Since Ryouma's past couldn't be investigated, she had predicted that Ryouma was a summoned person.

This meant that she had absolute confidence in her intelligence network.

“Well... To be honest, I was not entirely sure when I said you were an otherworlder. I do think that the possibility is high, but... Usually, a summoned person would be unable to escape, since the summoner would put a Geass magic immediately on them.”

“I see... So then, since you know that much, what are you going to do? Are you hostile towards me?”

Thirst for blood surged from Ryouma's body.

Of course, this was an attempt to threaten her. If he was seriously going to kill her, he would have silently thrust his hand into her throat.

A few seconds passed, and it seemed that Simone also understood Ryouma's intentions. Despite having been showered by Ryouma's killing intent directly, she did not show any reaction.

“No... I have no such intentions. I am speaking honestly like this because I wanted to show you the value of our intelligence network, and also as a proof that we do not hold any hostility against Baron-sama.”

It is true that talking honestly about the information one holds about one's opponent shows that the former doesn't bear hostility.

If Simone had any hostility towards against Ryouma, she wouldn't have disclosed such information.

“Hoohou, I see... For the sake of talking heart-to-heart is it?”

Ryouma then erased his murderous aura.

“As expected... You are so strong, to the point I was unable to move my body...”

“It seems you still had some room for it though?”

“That is because I knew that Baron-sama was not serious...”

Simone showed a mysterious smile, just like a mischievous child would.

“I see... But, it seems like the person hiding behind the wall does not think the same as you though? I can feel their presence, you know?”

“It couldn’t be helped. Since I also have considered that this might have been some devious scheme by Mistel’s henchmen. Please excuse me for that...”

Saying that, Simone bowed her head deeply.

Along with that, the strong presence from behind the wall disappeared.

“Is that the man who guided us before?”

“Yes, he is my aide and also bodyguard... Ah come to think of it, I also should apologize for having taken the swords as well.”

“I don't mind. I'm not someone who's obsessed with such a thing, and as a side note, you can relax.”

Listening to Ryouma's words, Simone sat on the sofa, relaxing her body while showing a bitter smile.

“Then, let us start our negotiation shall we? I have grasped some of Baron-sama’s intentions by coming here. Baron-sama wants to purchase some supplies until the Wortenia peninsula becomes self-sufficient. Am I right?”

Simone's eyes were smiling. However, her aura and behavior changed completely the moment they began the negotiation.

Her gaze turned sharp like a sword.

“Indeed... You're right, and in the future, I'm planning on performing trade by making a port in the peninsula. In the time to come, I want to leave the selling and procurement of goods to the Christoph firm as our exclusive partner.”

Hearing Ryouma's statement, Simone's expression changed.

She probably did not consider that far.

“That is... Indeed a magnificent plan... If it can be realized, the peninsula would be able to obtain a very abundant financial resource and not some semi-permanent wealth... Why did you ask us for help?”

Simone's voice was trembling. It couldn't be helped.

If Ryouma's story could be made into a reality, then the Christoph firm that would be helping him would be given special privileges and would be able to garner a huge fortune that couldn't be compared to the other firms' current businesses.

If it were a trader with little to no power, such a plan would be deemed impossible. However, inside Simone's mind, the appearance of a port being built on the Wortenia peninsula clearly emerged.

“However, to do that, a lot of time and money would be needed... Furthermore, this is not something that can be left halfway through. In other words, as you provide some funds, we would also share the same fate.”

Ryouma's proposal was talking about the future.

In order to get there, he needed to make a town on the peninsula and secure trade routes.

It was a proposal that would take many years.

If she went along with his plan, then it would be the same as betting the fate of the Christoph firm on Ryouma.

But inside Simone's mind, she had already made her decision.

Even without Ryouma saying anything, she was planning to offer some funds.

“Fine by me... That was actually my intention from the beginning... Though, I did not think it would be this big...”

“I see... As expected, the firm seems to be barely standing, eh?”

Ryouma stared at Simone with inquisitive eyes.

Her store was indeed filled with expensive and old furniture that one could see was inherited for many generations.

With such an appearance, it was hard to believe that the Christoph firm was facing some sort of financial crisis.

But then again, that was only a facade.

That is because there couldn't possibly be a future for a business firm that had lost all of their business partners and were also unable to find new ones.

"Indeed... Since we still have some assets we will still be able to stay alive for a while, but in this state, it would be great if we managed to survive for another three years. We had to make the decision by then. Either abandoning Epiroz city and finding a new base, or finding a new source of strength, enough to compete against the Earl and the Mistel firm."

"I see... I guess we need to know about each other more, eh?"

Simone nodded her head in response to Ryouma's statement.

"Indeed... We should talk more about each other..."

Ryouma then talked about his plan and future prospects.

After that, he needed to show Simone that he had the power to realize it.



"By the way, how did you get Kirtantia's tea leaf? Kirtantia is a major power located in the western part of the continent. That means it would demand a considerably long time to establish this trade, either using the sea or the land route, am I right?"

After explaining his present condition to the Christoph firm, Ryouma asked Simone the question that he was most concerned about.

Goods carried from a great distance are expensive, because the transport fees are also included in the price.

Despite being in dire financial problems, the Christoph firm was using expensive tea leaves.

Furthermore, it was from Kirtantia. Here Ryouma felt some hidden intention.



“So you have noticed... This tea is something that I ordered from Fulzad the other day.”

Saying those words, Simone spreaded the map of the continent on the table.

“Do you know the port town of Fulzad that is located in the Mist Kingdom?”

“Of course. I've been there once.”

Hearing Ryouma's words, Simone nodded while pointing her finger to the left end of the map.

“The tea that is currently being served is the best product from Kirtantia. It is one of the best products traded at a very high price in other countries... This tea leaf is produced in a city located in the northwest part of Kirtantia.”

Her finger pointed to a mountainous city, a little distance away from the coastline.

“The tea leaves produced there are then transported to the nearby trading city, Lorcana, from where they are shipped to the east by sea.”

Having said that, Simone's finger moved from Lorcana to the south of the continent and then towards the port town of Fulzad.

Lorcana's location was in the northwest corner of Kirtantia. It was obvious that this route would mean making a long detour.

Considering the distance, they would need to sail around nearly two-thirds of the western continent. *<PRN: they made a “U” around the continent.>*

Ryouma then stared at Simone suspiciously.

“Have you noticed?”

“Why did they go through such a roundabout route? No wait, I see! It was because of the Wortenia peninsula, huh?!”

“That is right. The reason for the detour is the Wortenia peninsula... That place is the biggest reason why the north cannot be used as sea route.”

Even before the pirates appeared, the northern sea route was being avoided by sailors. The reason was simple. It was because there was no port on the peninsula for resupplying the ships.

Of course, that was natural since there were no people there. But because of that, it would also be hard for sailors to ask for help in case of an emergency.

One could not know what would happen in the ocean.

Even in the coastal areas, there were monsters that inhabited the sea, and there was also the problem regarding storms.

It would be hard if by some chance the rudder or some other part of the ship broke because of it.

If that were the case, there would be no choice but to go ashore and wait for the repairs to finish.

It took around seven to ten days to sail around the peninsula by a normal ship.

Considering the dangers, it was natural for seafarers not to use the northern route.

“Furthermore, there are pirates who have strongholds there. With so many additional hazards, it was obvious for the northern route to be abandoned.”

“In other words, by building a port town for the re-supplying of ships and suppressing the pirates that have made their stronghold on the Wortenia peninsula one can make huge profits... Simone, you told me this story about the Kirtantian tea... Was it because you've planned to build a port town on the peninsula from the beginning?”

“Yes... If a port was built on the peninsula, Kirtantia would not be the only objective. Trade with Ernestgora and others would be possible as well... if that happens, the peninsula will turn into a mountain of treasure.”



Saying that, Simone's eyes shined mysteriously.

She was about to stake her whole fortune and future and bet on Ryouma's plan and ideas.

“I see... Turns out, this is not me testing you, but you testing me instead, huh?”

This talk was to see if he could understand her plan, and whether or not he would lend her his power.

And if by any chance Ryouma was a fool, she was ready to leave Epiroz.

“To be honest, I never expected Baron-sama to understand up to here. If by any chance Baron-sama thought the same things as I did... I had decided to venture the whole of our Christoph firm.”

“Did I pass your test then?”

Hearing Ryouma's words, Simone smiled gently and presented her right hand.

“Of course. Please, by all means, lend our Christoph firm your power.”

Her smile was not only solemn, but also beautiful.

It was the face of a noble warrior who was ready to fight.

# Chapter 9

## Towards The Peninsula 9

*Day 9th, 8th Months, the Year 2812, Western continent calendar.*

“Hoooh... She was trying to test my Lord? Despite being a woman who leads a business firm, she seems to be a capable one, eh? But still... Being able to thoroughly investigate the matter regarding my Lord like that... I guess her intelligence network can't be underestimated. It would also turn troublesome if we became her enemies.”

Genou's eyes turned sharp after hearing Ryouma's story during the meeting.

For Genou, being able to probe Ryouma's background seemed to have elevated his impression of Simone.

He was not someone who was blind because of loyalty.

'What?! To think someone is trying to test my Lord! Unforgivable!' Although usually he was someone who might have said something like that, but as expected, he wouldn't do it in this kind of place where many people were present.

“Well, for now, there's little possibility for her to turn into our enemy. As long as she's planning to stay in Epiroz, I'm an essential existence for her. And, I have the rights over the Wortenia peninsula... But well, if I have to say, we also don't know when the situation will change. Just keep your eyes on her, Genou.”

“Understood... But her intelligence network is really remarkable... I think she uses the merchants to conduct information gathering, what do you think?”

“It appears to be so. It seems that since they are an old business firm, they have a lot of connections within the country and overseas. With that being the case, they might be using some kind of carrier pigeon at regular intervals to exchange information.”

“A firm with a long history, huh... Like that, they need to organize and send people to gather information.”

“Right, they seem to have dispatched merchants to trade while also telling them to

gather information... In the future, Genou has to work in cooperation with them... Since if they were only capable of listening then I wouldn't be able to put up a fight even if it was only for self-defense." <TLN: What it means by self-defense here is counter-intelligence.>

"If that's the case, then please let us support my Lord from the shadows."

As far as acquiring a wide range of information using a large number of people, Simone was the better option. However, when it came to assassination, stealing, and other clandestine operations, Genou was far more suitable.

If one could successfully combine the advantages of both it would become a very powerful intelligence organization.

A calm and relaxed smile appeared on Genou's face.

He seemed to be relieved that his value did not go down.

"Well, isn't that good? Despite being unscheduled, for such an agreement to come from the first discussion with her, it was not bad. So boy, are you also going to leave the purchase of supplies to the Christoph firm as well?"

"No... I do not have any intention of trading with the Christoph firm this soon."

"Eh? What does that mean? I thought the meeting a while ago was to start a deal? If not them, who are you going to buy our supplies from?!"

While feeling surprised Lione raised her voice.

They had looked specifically for a firm that had nothing to do with the Earl, and even made an agreement of cooperation with that Christoph firm.

Yet, Ryouma said that he would not make any trades with the Christoph firm so soon.

In Epiroz, there were nine other business firms.

However, all of them were under the Mistel firm's umbrella which was siding with Earl Salzberg.

"Of course, we're going to trade with the Mistel firm... Well, I've also discussed this

with Simone... It would be bad for us if we immediately traded with her Christoph firm. That would only alert the Earl, see?"

Everyone was convinced when Ryouma said those words.

For Earl Salzberg, if Ryouma made any dealings with the Christoph firm he hated, it would only raise a feeling of danger inside him.

'Why did he trade with a business firm that is my enemy? Does he intend to going up against me?' Such thoughts might have surface within the Earl's mind.

For the current Ryouma, such a situation would be undesirable.

That was why Ryouma and Simone decided it was best for them if he traded with the Mistel firm and the others first, until they had enough power to go up against the Earl's might.

On the other hand, Ryouma would be leaking information to Simone while also preparing themselves for a future confrontation against the Earl.

Besides, for Ryouma, Earl Salzberg might have provided various conveniences if he were to ask for them earnestly.

The reason for this was that for the Earl, there was still the issue where he was embezzling the crown, by way of the rock salt vein operation.

"I see... Indeed, that would be a safe move."

"I agree."

The two people who usually gave input to Ryouma with wisdom agreed.

"Well, I guess, it really sounds like you. Especially with how you're trying to use the Earl as much as you can," Lione laughed loudly while saying those words.

What she meant was that Ryouma always made his opponents become careless and then destroyed them with one blow, placing emphasis on efficiency. Some might call people like that cowards.

However, someone who could do something like that usually became a formidable adversary.

“But still, Ryouma-sama, to meet with the Christoph firm first and not Mistel’s... Won't that make the Earl grow suspicious of us then?” Sara’s eyes who were looking at Ryouma looked uneasy.

“Well... According to Simone, they always dispatched someone to watch the Christoph building... Thus, no matter what I do, they would know that I've visited her.”

“Then, what are we going to do?”

“Well, I will just talk honestly: ‘I tried to purchase some supplies from her and she refused’...Because of that, I now run and ask the Earl for help, requesting him to introduce me to the Mistel firm.”

‘He refrained to ask the Earl for help immediately because he couldn’t afford to trouble the Earl without reason. And the reason why he visited the Christoph firm first was simply because the shop seemed to be empty.’

Using that, Ryouma would go to meet the Lord of Epiroz, seeking help purposefully after telling him that he was being rejected by the Christoph firm.

Ryouma would then tell the Earl that he aimed to make a deal not only with the Christoph firm, but with the others as well. This, in turn, would create the impression that he did not have the intention of antagonizing the Earl...

Based on Simone’s and Genou's descriptions of the Earl, the nobleman was a completely different person compared the one he had seen at the castle.

The way he praised Ryouma and also his kindness... All of that was an act.

The truth was that he was an arrogant person who looked down on other people.

Considering his personality, if Ryouma were to come to him and beg him for aid in earnest, it would then fulfill the Earl's sense of superiority.

Thus, the Earl would never suspect Ryouma's maneuver.

“I see... You've thought about it that far ahead while also considering the Earl's personality, huh?”

“As usual, young master is really a terrifying person...”



Such casual tones were voiced by some of his close subordinates.

“To mix the truth with a lie would make it a good lie. One that will not only make the Earl incautious and inadvertent towards us, but also give us some help while at it. After that, I just have to exploit him until I have no further use for him anymore.”

Saying that, Ryouma showed a cold smile.

He was planning to provoke the Earl's carelessness, and then use it against him.

“I guess, that is good enough... But what are we going to do about the population?”

Genou voiced his question.

For the time being, they had solved the problems regarding hiring the mercenaries and the purchasing of supplies.

What was left was the problem regarding the people that would become the future citizens of Wortenia.

“That huh... Does anyone have an idea?”

Clearly, this problem was a very hard one, since in the first place, it was a difficult thing to settle inhabitants.

For example, if Ryouma set up a notice board in the neighboring cities and villages, advertising that he was gathering emigrants, was there anyone who would then be willing to apply? 'To go to an undeveloped territory such as Wortenia?' such doubts were in Ryouma's mind.

Powerful monsters wandered around, not to mention the pirates that had strongholds within the territory.

Not only that, but it was also a territory that had no resources. Normally, what he could provide was some form of tax incentives, but with just that, nobody would be willing to move in.

Besides, even if some of them did migrate, another problem would arise, and that was

related to the nobles who would have previously been their lords.

People that lived in a territory paid taxes. What would happen if someone took those people? The number of the taxpayers would decrease, and in turn, the income of the nobles would also decrease.

Which would end up with either the nobles complaining to Lupis or using brute force.

And then, whichever was chosen, Ryouma's fate would have been over.

Regardless, Ryouma's current situation was that he was weaker than any other noble in the area.

When Ryouma asked the question to see if someone had any idea, everybody remained silent, thinking of some possible solutions.

After having acted together with Ryouma all this time, they also understood the importance of ideas.

The ideas that defied the common sense of this world! It was that kind of ideas that often led to a solution for their problems.

"How about this... It would cost money but we could gather some slaves who would then become permanent residents in the future... And it is also a good way to avoid the other nobles' scrutiny."

The surrounding people turned their gaze on Sara.

Her words were very convenient for the current situation that Ryouma was in. No, rather, it could be said that it was too good to be true.

For Ryouma, being able to solve the current problem with gold was so convenient that it was hard to believe.

'If you want citizens, then buy them'. Such a convenient way, did it even exist?

"There are a lot of slave merchants in the backstreets of this town. How about buying some labor slaves at that place? With this, we can get the people we want by using gold. Magic arts can be mastered by anyone anyways, which means we'd have to educate them. This way, it would be a lot safer for us to buy slaves rather than taking

residents from other territories and angering the nobles by doing so.”

Hearing Sara's explanation, everyone immediately thought about the merits and demerits of her idea.

The first one who broke the silence was Genou.

“It is not bad... But what worries me is that the slaves might turn against my Lord.”

“Genou-dono’s doubts are reasonable. In the first place, our finances are already tight, no?”

“How about we buy them in bulk? Since slave labor is cheap, we can ask for a discount if we buy them in large amounts... If we go with this, we shouldn’t have to worry about the money.”

If Ryouma purchased the slaves at once, he could negotiate the price of the individual slaves and ask for a discount.

And if they bought them on a regular basis, the slave merchants wouldn’t be able to refuse their offer.



“But, what are we going to do if they rebelled? Even if we managed to get the gold, will these slaves really become Ryouma's people?”

“Then how about we offered them their freedom?”

Towards Sara's suggestion, Lione shows an expression as if she doubted what she had just heard.

“Ha? What are you saying? After we buy them with our own money, we release them?”

“Yes. Both my sister and I were originally war slaves, but Ryouma-sama released us. Because of that, we hold the utmost loyalty towards Ryouma-sama. If back then we had still been slaves then the story would have been different...”

If they had been still slaves, they wouldn't have held such loyalty for him like this.

Everyone understood what Sara's words implied.

They suspected that most humans would hold no loyalty towards a master as a slave.

They would only serve their master out of fear of being hurt, while deep inside their hearts a smoldering murderous intent would be lodged.

In their minds would for ever remain the intention to murder their master the moment they found a chance to act on it.

"I see... You guys... So that's how it is..."

Lione murmured some words as if having just realized something.

Both she and Bolts always wondered why did the Marfisto sisters displayed such a strong devotion and trust towards Mikoshiba Ryouma.

(I see... Slaves are also living beings. Meaning, they also have the sense of gratitude...)

Lione at least could understand what kind of life a slave had. It was full of humiliation and suffering.

Lione herself came from a commoner family. And as a commoner, both her status and life were not that far apart compared to a slave's.

When commoners couldn't pay taxes, or the country lost a war, they would usually end up being sold as slaves.

What would follow was a thorny road where they lost all of their human dignity with little hope to regain it until the end of their lives.

"I see, that is not bad, letting them feel loyalty towards my Lord by setting them free, while also making their hatred towards nobility disappear... I say, it is not a bad idea at all..."

Their fealty to Ryouma as a feudal lord would be the most important thing. Or one could also say, their devoted love, support, and defense of what they would consider their home, Wortenia.

Ryouma himself was only an upstart, but he would give them the one thing that they

usually wouldn't be able to obtain.

As long as Ryouma did not make any foolish policies, they wouldn't disobey him.

"Very good indeed... We can give them some salvation from slavery as well... I will immediately begin to look around the slave traders starting tomorrow. Sara, Laura, you both come with me. Genou, continue to keep an eye on Earl Salzberg! Lione-san should continue hiring mercenaries, and as for Bolts, continue looking for information regarding the peninsula." <TLN: It is weird that sometimes Ryouma called Lione without using honorific and sometimes he use it.>

Everyone nodded their heads.

Ryouma hated the slavery system which treated humans as if they were mere commodities.

He thought it was important for a human being to have their own free will.

This could also be said to be why he hated Lupis.

That was because she ignored Ryouma's identity as a person and his intentions.

The oppressed Ryouma would in consequence borrow the power of the oppressed slaves to retaliate.

Will the story end up as exciting as it sounds?

(Class system? All of that can just go to hell! I'm going to crush all of you bastards to oblivion!)

This day would later be known as the day the oppressed people first saw the light.

The will of the people inside this room was one that would eventually swallow the entire continent.

# Chapter 10

## Towards The Peninsula 10

*Day 10th, 8th Month, the Year 2812, Western continent calendar.*

“Is this the place?”

When the sun passed its peak and was about to set in the western sky, Ryouma arrived at his destination

In front of Ryouma, there was a dimly lit alley.

Despite having just come out of the main street, the darkness covered the alley.

“Here is where the shops that deal with slaves are.”

Ryouma nodded his head after hearing Laura's explanation and stepped into the dark side of the world.



“Welcome, milord! Is this your first visit? I am extremely honored with your presence, sire. We are the biggest slave merchants of Epiroz city. Labor slaves, sex slaves, and even war slaves! We guarantee that we have all types and as many as you could possibly want. We are confident that we can find apt slaves that will suit your taste, sire.”



The big guy with whiskers on his face that seemed to be the shopkeeper lowered his head the moment Ryouma entered the store.

Surrounding them there were slaves bound by chains, staring at Ryouma and the others with dead eyes.

Different compared to the shopkeeper whose eyes shimmered as if seeing gold. It was as if his face were saying "I'm greedy".

His body could be considered tall and also large. Although his height was slightly shorter than Ryouma's, his girth was definitely the size of three Ryoumas.

He wore a robe with a long hem and decorated his body with jewels. There was also a leather whip hanging from his waist.

One could easily guess that the whip was for disciplining the rebellious slaves. The grip on the leather wrapped around the handle seemed to be smooth, indicating that the whip was frequently used.

"I'm looking for slaves."

Ryouma tried to suppress his emotions as much as possible.

If Sara and Laura hadn't clutched the hem of his robes, Ryouma would have started raining blows upon the slave merchant's face at that very moment.

However, the merchant seemed to have failed to realize what was in Ryouma's heart.

"Oh! Thank you very much. So then milord, is it labor slaves you want? Or perhaps some sex slaves to play with? If it is war slaves we do have some but the amount would be limited since our current stock is small. Please speak, what type of slave would you like to purchase?"

The shopkeeper was full of smiles while he rubbed his hands.

In spite of his appearance which made him seem like a slow-witted person, his declaration showed he was an affluent merchant.

Besides, if one were to look at him as a merchant and how he tried to please his customers, one could even go so far as to say that he was a good merchant. <TLN: As in good at his 'job' as a merchant.>



Only a few people would be able to realize that Ryouma was a noble by simply looking at him in his current appearance.

After all, Ryouma was wearing only a silk shirt and the cloak that he wore when he met Earl Salzberg, and he did not wear any accessories that would indicate that he was from nobility.

“I want slaves, a lot of them. But not only that, I also have several conditions. Males and females, ages ranging from 10 to 15... As for the ratio, I want it to be balanced. For now, I want around 300 people... If you don't have enough in your store, you can call out the other slave merchants and gather the required amount”

After hearing that, the slaver couldn't help staring blankly.

It was because Ryouma's statement was too unexpected.

“Excuse me, sire, wouldn't those slaves be too young for grunt work? I think slaves around the age of 20 would be more suitable for labor... Even if the slaves were to be used as a disposable labor force, I think they wouldn't be too useful... And if we talk about reselling them as sex slaves, as labor slaves, they do not possess the necessary looks to qualify as sex slaves... And 300 people? Our shop is the biggest slave-dealer in Epiroz, but with those numbers... Even our shop won't be able to meet your demand... I beg your pardon sir, just what are you going to do with them?”

When the slave merchant asked that, Ryouma shifted his gaze toward his eyes.

A labor slave was mainly used for agriculture. They were usually treated as farming tools not unlike cows or horses.

And the value of labor slaves depended on their strength.

Men were therefore considered more suitable than women because of this, and usually, they were sold as adults rather than children.

Although some might have bought women for labor, it was uncommon for someone to actually want them in the same amount as the men.

At least, for the slave merchant who had a long history in the business, this was the first time he had experienced something like this.

Furthermore, Ryouma did not bear the countenance of someone with some lolita-complex. <PFN: i don't think anyone needs this explanation, but just in case, it means to love small girls, a lolicon, a paedophile.>

Not to mention, those children would have underdeveloped strength. And because their body is still growing and developing, they would need more food than usual.

In other words, those children worked less and were more costly to maintain.

Thus it was natural for the slaver to ask such questions. However, Ryouma answered him with a cold voice.

“It's none of your business, is it?”

When Ryouma said those words, the sisters who stood behind him trembled. And it was also the same for the slave trader.

Ryouma never raised his voice. In fact, from the tone of his voice, it was that of a calm character.

However, his voice felt very cold, as if it were a steel blade.

And his message was clearly being conveyed to the slave dealer.

(I will f\*cking kill you...)

Inside the slave merchant's mind a scene played where he was being slaughtered.

So far, he had slain a lot of slaves.

Old slaves, rebellious slaves, slaves who had lost some part of their bodies and slaves that had been infected by some illness, among others. And the slaves that the man before Ryouma had slaughtered the most were the children.

For him, younglings who couldn't be expected to become labor slaves were annoying.

At first, he would always chain the children he bought cheaply on the storefront.

Most importantly, he bought youngsters who had both good looks and physical strength, since that way they would still be of use.

But naturally, even with that, there remained some children left without buyers. Those who couldn't be sold even after a certain period of time were usually disposed of by the slave merchant.

He did this in order to avoid the expense of feeding merchandise that would only be a burden to him, and which would then cause his profits to decrease.

In opposition to their traded goods, the slave dealers were known to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle, growing fat from the profit of their shady business.

Concerning all the cruelty he was responsible for, he fully disregarded it. After all, in his mind he had simply gotten rid of defective slaves. As for those victims of his trade, in his eyes were nothing but tools in human shape.

And when a person stops seeing another person as a human, all feelings as a fellow man would disappear. That was why he did not feel any kind of pity.

And right then, when looking at him, Ryouma's eyes shined just like how the slave merchant's when looking at his own slaves.

"N-No, of course not! Please forgive me. I beg your pardon! Please! I was a fool! Please forgive me..."



The slave merchant immediately crawled on the ground, begging for forgiveness.

Around them, there were no slaves, but he had no intention to pretend either. He knew, unless he was forgiven, he would have no way to survive that day.

This was not because Ryouma was a nobleman. Even if he had been a commoner, the slave merchant would have done the same.

The slaver could see the clear difference in power between them and that it'd be effortless for the young man before him to end his life.

“Ryouma-sama...”

Laura strongly pulled Ryouma's cloak, while he was looking down at the shopkeeper, who kept bowing down on the ground, with a cold stare.

To be honest, Laura and Sara also wanted to kill the slave merchant.

They had also seen the gruesome condition in which the slaves inside the store were.

Living amidst filth and squalor; whip scars clearly seen on their bodies; they had probably never even taken a bath before! Their hair was matted, and their clothing was less than minimal. In the case of the children, they seemed to be lucky to even wear underwear. The majority of the others were not so fortunate and were outright naked.

The light of life had disappeared from their eyes.

What was left was only dead eyes, staring at the empty void.

Even though Sara and Laura were slaves once, they had been born and raised in a prestigious knight's house.

And most importantly, they both were very beautiful. That was why, even when they were slaves the same as the ones they've just met, they had never been treated too harshly.

In that sense, the slave merchant who had bought the sisters could even be considered as a kind person.

That is, compared to the man who was grovelling before them at the moment.

“Ryouma-sama... Right now is...”

Once again, Laura pulled Ryouma's cloak.

“I know... I'm fine Laura... I know that I should not listen to my guts right now...”

Ryouma tried his best to hold down his emotions.

(Calm down... I can't do anything right away... If I killed this guy now, I won't be able to save anyone...)

As he was going further inside the alley, Ryouma gradually grew angrier, but for the time being, he couldn't let his anger explode.

This was due to the fact that this was also part of Earl Salzberg's territory. What this meant was that the slave merchants had gotten permission for their businesses from him.

If Ryouma made some sort of trouble here, he would be blamed for disturbing the Earl's citizens' livelihood.

At the time, Ryouma had yet to achieve any real power. And since he understood that, he tried to ignore all the misery that he saw around him.

It was the hapless merchant's last utterance that caused him to be unable to hold all of his anger in and let part of it exude.

Fortunately for the slave dealer, Ryouma did not draw his sword immediately.

“Enough... Raise your head...”

“Y-Yes! T-Thank you very much.”

Following Ryouma's statement, the slave merchant immediately complied.

He tried to not do anything unnecessary anymore, thinking that if he worsened the young nobleman's mood once again, he might get butchered on the spot.

“I will say it once again... I want 300 slaves, both males and females, with healthy bodies, and their ages need to be around 10 to 15 years old. Can you prepare all of that?”

Ryouma repeated his wish once again.

“O-Of course... Please let me arrange your order, milord! Leave it to me. We will risk even our lives so that we can prepare all of them.”

This time, the slave merchant also did not utter any useless drivel.

And responded to Ryouma with just the necessary words.

“Good then... First of all, how much is it for 300 people?”

“The prices depend on their gender and age...”

“How much?”

Ryouma repeated his query while showing that he was once again beginning to feel annoyed.

“H-How about 1.5 million baht?”

This meant that a single head would cost 5,000 baht. Converted to Japanese Yen, that would be 100,000 Yen in total.

Ryouma wondered if it was because of his previous burst of anger that he was being given such a bargain. But since Ryouma did not know the price for the children in the first place, he was not entirely sure either. However, for now, Ryouma agreed on the price.

“Fine... At what time shall I come to get my goods?”

“Well, because this shop alone cannot fulfill that order, if possible please give me a week of time!”

“Very well... How about the delivery place?”

“I am very sorry, but since it is 300 people it would be hard to do it inside the city... How about we meet on the outskirts of Epiroz?”

Indeed, it was impossible to deliver all 300 slaves inside this dark alley.....

It was necessary for them to meet at a spacious place.

(Well, we also need to leave towards the outskirts to provide those slaves with some education. North of the city is the border with the Wortenia peninsula, while the to the west is the border with the Zalda Kingdom... I guess we'll have to camp on the eastern outskirts, huh...)

Ryouma immediately calculated everything in his head.

“I'd rather meet at the eastern outskirts... I will pay half of the price now. The rest will be paid after you deliver all the goods to me. Is that fine?”

Ryouma took the gold bag from Sara and handed it to the slave merchant without even counting what was inside of it.

“Inside, there's 750,000 baht. Go and confirm it, then bring me the receipt.”

“Please wait a moment!”

After receiving the gold from Ryouma, the slaver ran into the shop. Very shortly after, he returned with the receipt in his hand.

He did not dare to count the money inside the bag.

As a merchant such an act would be considered sloppy, but in this case, no one could blame him, since he was in a state of shock and excitement.

“Well then... One week, is that right?”

“Yes, sire! Thank you very much for your patronage. Please rest assured, we will definitely deliver the goods after a week!”

Ryouma immediately left the shop, ignoring the slave merchant who bent down his body.



He did not want to stay any longer in such a place.

Inside there, Ryouma had to constantly fight the urge to puke.

The shop emitted too much feeling of human greed and malice, which caused Ryouma to become nauseous.

Ryouma's group quickly walked out of the dark alley until they had finally come back to the bright town's main street.

The three people then breathed out a deep sigh.

"Ryouma-sama... Are you alright?"

Laura anxiously asked Ryouma.

"Yeah... I'm fine... Forget about me, are you two fine?"

In response to Ryouma's question, the two sisters silently nodded.

Their expression was stiff.

"I guess that was the dark side of this world, huh... Damn it!"

Although he already knew about the slave system, the reality was harsher than he had imagined.

(I will definitely change it... Absolutely!)

Ryouma vowed inside his heart.

He realized that such a vow was just self-satisfaction.

What he had just witnessed was the reality of this world. And what Ryouma could take care of right now was just the tip of the iceberg.

# Chapter 11

## Towards The Peninsula 11

*Day 17th, 8th Month, the Year 2812, Western continent calendar.*

One week had passed as promised.

Ryouma and the others left the inn they were using as their base and set up a camp 3km away from Epiroz's eastern gate.

Before entering the peninsula, they all had to undergo a series of trainings and trials. However, other than the Earl's private army's training field there was no place large enough for them to train within the confines of the fortress city.

That was why Ryouma chose to camp outside of the settlement, since one did not simply ask the Earl to lend him the place.

"Preparations are already complete... What is left now is to see how many people are going to pull through what's to come, I guess..."

The sun reached its peak. Ryouma's eyes gazed at the walls of Epiroz.

"It is impossible to expect all 300 people to survive... I think we should be satisfied if half of them survived, don't you think so my Lord?"

Genou, who stood behind Ryouma, said those words.

"I guess so..."

Ryouma shrugged his shoulders and replied Genou in a relaxed manner.

A week had passed since he had made the deal with the slave merchant.

From here on the selection of personnel would begin. The strong ones; the smart ones;

and all those who possessed a strong will.

Only children possessing such traits would be given their freedom.

Of course, everyone was going to be released from slavery.

However, in this world, only the strong could possibly obtain true freedom.

But still, the children bought by Ryouma were certainly fortunate.

Whether they could obtain their freedom or not wasn't the point, but that, unlike most in the same circumstances, they were at least being given the opportunity to grasp it with their own hands.

"My Lord, you ought not to worry about it too much... I think those children are already lucky enough to be bought by none other than my Lord."

Hearing Genou's words, Ryouma frowned.

Ryouma was aware of this even without Genou saying it, he already knew. It was just... Even if the young man realized such things, his heart still couldn't accept it fully.

(I, who is buying those children to be used, and the slave merchant, who sold those children... I guess I'm no different, huh...)

This train of thought rose inside Ryouma's mind.

However, he also knew that he couldn't be soft and stop here, because it was at this moment that everything would begin.

"Young master! The merchants have arrived."

Bolts' voice hailing Ryouma could be heard.

"Understood! I will go meet them immediately. Let's go, Genou."

After having said those words he began walking towards the open area. The hesitation that had once shown on Ryouma's face was nowhere to be seen.

He comprehended better than anyone else that reality was harsh and heartless, and that if he were to hesitate here, this 'truth' wouldn't change.

"Milord, thank you very much for using our services. As promised, we've prepared the items. Please check them, sire."

After saying that the slave merchant bowed his head carefully just like how he did the other day.

"It seems like I've caused you some trouble, huh?"

Even if Ryouma didn't care for the other person, he wouldn't dismiss their hard labor, and would never forget to appreciate it.

"There's no such thing, sire. After all, this is a business... Furthermore, the business is currently on the downslope and we have been unable to attract many customers. Actually, I'm very grateful to milord for bringing us this deal..."

The slave merchant waved his hands and denied Ryouma's concession.

Ryouma's gaze then turned cold, looking at the slaves standing behind the slave trader. There appeared to be more girls than boys.

Ryouma then questioned the slave trader in a forceful tone.

"Well, whatever. So then? What about the ratio and quantity that I have requested?"

"Well, yes... In fact, I've brought 320 people with me here. In term of ratio, it's 7:3 between females and males."

"Isn't the amount exceeding that of my request?"

"Yes milord... Because there weren't enough male labor slaves... As compensation, we brought more than 300 people."

Upon hearing the slave merchant's excuse, Ryouma did not try to hide his bad mood.

"I take it that this is your form of apologizing?"

The slave trader smiled without saying anything.

“Well fine then... None of them bear any physical defects, right?”

“Yes milord. I've thoroughly examined each and everyone of them. None suffers any type of ailment.”

Some of the slaves bore whip scars on their bodies, but they were only scratches that were within the scope of possible recovery.

As expected of a trusted slave dealer, he seemed to understand how to perform a good trade.

“Very well. I'll trust you... I will take all of them. You now just need me to pay the remaining 750,000 baht, am I right?”

“Yes, that is right, sire.”

Ryouma lightly nodded his head and handed over the money bag to the slave trader.

“Thank you very much.”

The slave merchant immediately lowered his head without even checking the money inside the bag, very much like he once did back at the shop.

Then he presented Ryouma with two documents.

“Then please sign this delivery note milord... With this, all the slaves here now belong to Mikoshiba-sama. One piece of the document will be given to Mikoshiba-sama, and we will keep the copy.”

After confirming that Ryouma's name was written in the documents, the slave merchant nodded visibly satisfied, then he put one of the documents back in his bag.

“With this, we've finished our trade, milord. In the future, please use our services again, the Abutal firm.”

Pleased with the trade, the slave traders left the camp with smiles on their faces.

“Now then... Lione! Distribute the clothes that we've prepared. After that, Laura! Are the meals ready?”

Even if the weather at the time was mild, people could still get sick if left naked.

Ryouma had already seen how the slave merchants treated the slaves back at the shop, so in preparation for this moment, Ryouma had arranged for clothes, underwear and warm meals to be ready for the slaves.

He had thought that the slave merchants might have provided some clothing when they delivered the slaves, but it seemed that this kind of service did not exist in this world.

First of all, Ryouma had to let the slaves put on some clothes.

The members of Red Lion distributed the garments to the slaves who were standing still like dolls without a soul or will of their own.

“Boy, we've finished distributing the clothes...”

Lione showed a troubled expression while reporting to Ryouma.

The cause was clear. It was because, even after being given the clothes, the slaves only held them in their hands.

Normally naked people would immediately put the clothes on.

Or at least, normal people would ask if they could wear them or not.

However, these children just stood there silently.

They received the outfits but did nothing, not even asking anything.

“These children... Why won't they put the clothes on? It can't be, it isn't because they don't know how to wear clothes, right?”

It wasn't like they were infants. They might have been slaves, but it would have been

too much if they didn't even know how to wear clothes!

"Ryouma-sama... Please leave this to me."

After saying this, Laura walked towards the children and spoke gently.

It was a most calm and gentle voice.

When spoken to like that, the children began to show some expressions.

At first, they showed surprised looks, then dazed looks. However, after Laura urged them to wear the clothes, the young crowd started to put on the garmens that they held in their hands with frightened expressions.

After a few minutes, all the children had gotten dressed.

"Just what did she say?"

It was normal for Ryouma to be taken by surprise.

The slave children's countenances were still gloomy. However, after Laura talked to them, some sort of expressions, even if a little, showed up on their faces.

Although it was faint, they now bore something akin to human expressions. Compared to their previous doll-like visage, Ryouma thought it was a great improvement.

"It's easy. I just told them that the clothes we've given to them are theirs."

"What do you mean? Wasn't that obvious?"

Ryouma's doubt was natural. For him, the clothes he had distributed were already the younglings' belongings.

However, Laura shook her head.

"Slaves can't think like that. They will accept the clothes only after their master clearly told them to... After all, I've experienced that kind of life for a long time as well..."

Thinking about it a little, Ryouma understood.

Because the children had been treated poorly, they had even repressed their will to question.

For a slave, the master's will would determine their life and death.

They had no rights. They only had to obey and not show incompetence, so that their master wouldn't get rid of them.

"Ah, I see now..."

After Laura's explanation, Ryouma finally comprehended the situation.

They couldn't do anything unless Ryouma gave them permission to. That was what the children believed.

Thus, Ryouma first had to order the children if he wanted them to do something, even though they were humans. Young men and women who had their own free will.

From there on, Ryouma discerned that he had to tell them loudly, and make them remember, that they were humans, that they were people with souls and wills of their own.



That day, Melissa's fate changed for the second time.

It was three years ago that her fate had changed dramatically for the first time.

She was born in a small fishing village in the Zalda Kingdom, while her family had been poor, she had lived surrounded by her family experiencing a peaceful life.

However, this life suddenly ended due to the pirates that came from the Wortenia peninsula.

She had learnt that sea raiders had made their base at the peninsula when she was an infant.

But, compared to the trade ships loaded with expensive goods, there wasn't much value in pillaging the fishing village.

That was why her village had never been attacked before.



Besides, who would want to attack a fishing hamlet just to get dried fish to begin with?

However, reality was harsher than she had previously thought.

In front of her eyes, a massacre took place.

Her parents died with their bodies skewered by spears. It was unknown to her what had happened to her siblings and friends.

There was only one thing an eleven years old girl could do back then. And that was to run away from that place.

She had managed to avoid the pirates' hands and escaped from her burning village.

What was inside her mind back then was the overpowering desire to survive.

She had no recollection of what had happened after that.

What she could remember was that she had managed to flee the village, but her memory was cut off from there.

The next thing she remembered was that she was picked up by some man from a certain town.

Then, all of a sudden she found herself standing naked side by side with people wearing collars.

Back then she could not fathom what had happened.

However, reality gradually hit her.

That was, the reality where she would get beaten no matter what she did or said.

When she cried, she would get flogged; when she shouted she would get flogged; when she begged she would get flogged; when she talked she would get flogged.

Like that, she learned how to take care of the scars caused by the whip.

She learned that to survive, she had to kill her own will and behave like a doll, devoid of any feelings.

Such thoughts continued to become more and more lodged in her mind after seeing many slaves being disposed of in front of her eyes.

Even more aggravating, she was a female slave, without much much physical strength.

Although her face could be said to be pretty, it was not a face that someone would deem a matchless beauty either.

She might have been sold as a sex slave if she had been a bit older, but she was only 14 years old right now.

Due to living the life of a slave for many years, her body had withered, it was not a body that could entice men's lust.

Had Mikoshiba Ryouma not bought her then, she might have ended up dying not long after.

However, fate worked in mysterious ways.

(These clothes... What should I do with them?)

Mellisa was brought together with the other slaves, and unlike some of the others, she at least wore a piece of underwear and a ragged piece of cloth given to her by a slave trader a long time ago.

Her fellow sufferers also showed puzzled expressions when they received the garments.

(What is this even? Can I wear it?)

The underwear she was wearing right then had been worn for months already and the ragged shirt was torn on more than one place, by courtesy of the slave trader's whip. That was the state and entirety of her current attire.

Of course, she yearned to change her clothes!

However, such a wish would never have been granted. Because she was only a thing.

When people were given something, normally they would immediately consider it theirs from then on.

However, at the same time, Melissa thought that something like that would have been impossible to happen to her.

(No... I am a thing... There are no people who give clothes to a thing...)

She promptly acted the way she consistently did.

This had to be a trap, similar to the time when the slave merchant presented them with meat and told them to eat. What followed then, was a thorough thrashing for those who took the food.

That was what something that Melissa had experienced in the past.

A slave's ration consisted of only hard bread and cold, bland soup.

There was no way that meat would be served to them. It was almost as impossible as for the heavens to turn upside down!

A slave could only eat food fit for slaves. Even if meat were to fall on the ground, a slave never ought to wish to eat it.

This very doctrine was drilled into the slaves by their owners and slave trader.

Down to the very core.

All the slave children that were brought outside the fortress city that day had gone through such brainwashing.

That was why nobody made their move.

They were all just standing still on the spot.

However, the situation abruptly moved in an unexpected direction for them.

A woman with blonde hair stood in front of her and proclaimed something that thoroughly surprised Melissa.

"It's cold, isn't it? Those clothes in your hands are yours from on. My master, Mikoshiba Ryouma gave those clothes to all of you. Wear them properly... That is what your master wants you to do."

When she heard those words, Melissa doubted her ears for a moment.

(Giving clothes to slaves? Really? This kind of good clothes?)

They were not clothes made from silk, these were articles that could be bought from any clothes store.

However, this was not something that a slave would usually be clothed in. They were items that would usually be worn by the town citizens.

Not only that, the items on her hands were also a brand-new one. Not some old used clothes.

It was definitely something excessive to be given to a slave.

Melissa looked around.

Very much like her, everyone else exhibited confusion after hearing the woman's announcement.

But, the speaker's voice was calm, and she did not show any hostility. She didn't seem to be lying.

"It's fine... Hurry and put on your clothes! After this, we're going to have a meal!"

Deciding to listen to her this time, a boy got dressed. Only after the others saw the blond woman nodding her head towards the daring boy, did they proceed to put on the clothes as well.

After all of the slaves became clothed, a man stood in front of them.

He was a greatly dignified person, displaying the august aura of a king.

It was at that very moment, that their fate as slaves changed forever.

It was the beginning of their harsh life towards freedom.

# Chapter 12

## Towards The Peninsula 12

*Day 17th, 8th Month, the Year 2812, Western continent calendar.*

Melissa and the other slaves finished putting the clothes on.

However, because none of them had ever taken a bath before, their hair was all tangled and twisted like a dumpling.

In other words, their appearance was one that shared quite a few similarities with that of modern vagabonds that could often be found sitting depressedly in an alley.

And now, after having donned new garments, it rather made their dirty bodies stand out all the more.

“Well... First, we need to give them food... After that, a bath, huh? It will be quite the challenge with this many...”

Ryouma’s concern was only to be expected.

A group of slaves was simply standing in front of him with empty eyes. It was a large group of over 300 people.

He could easily handle clothes and meals, but when it came to taking baths, the difficulty involved grew considerably.

There were public baths for the general public, but there was no way any of them would be able to take care of 320 people all at once.

And not only that, but because the slaves were terribly filthy, no matter how much Ryouma paid the public bathhouse, they would likely reject him.

Just imagining 320 people entering a single public bathhouse felt ludicrous to him.

As expected, it was out of the question to only rent a single building for bathing.

Of course, it would have been possible to push such unreasonableness if Ryouma had

flaunted his noble status, but Epiroz belonged to Earl Salzberg.

It would only spell trouble were he to force his wishes in a territory with a resident lord that was not him.

“First of all, let them eat their meals. It would be a pitiful waste if they were to get cold... As for the bath, we can just boil some water and let them scrub and wash their bodies.”

Ryouma nodded his head after hearing Laura's suggestion, then he called Lione out.

“Alright then... Lione! Go ahead and get started!”

There were a lot of things he needed to do; he felt like a juggler at a fair, keeping half a dozen balls in the air at once.

“Alright, everyone! Line up!”

Following Lione's directives, the children split into five lines.

They moved sluggishly, but they didn't fail to follow the instructions properly.

The children showed a confused expression while following Lione's instructions.

They were all still scared of the pain caused by the slavers' whips. Although Ryouma did not even consider the possibility of flogging them if they did not obey, the slaves believed differently. They were firmly convinced that their new master was no different to their previous ones, and would not hesitate to put the whip to use whenever he became displeased or had they not done as ordered.

Even after the children listened to Laura and wore their clothes, their eyes remained vacant.

“Heed my words, alright?! It's hot, so you need to eat it slowly and with care so that you don't get scalded!”

Once again Melissa could not give credence to her ears, from what she had just heard; nor to her eyes, for in front of her she could see a steaming, hot bowl of soup.

The soup was even filled with plenty of different ingredients.

Not only were there carrots, onions and potatoes, but also meat... It might have been different had the meat been just big enough for the sake of making stock, but this was not the case.

This kind of food was considered lavish even for the average commoner, let alone them, who had been abandoned by the gods of fortune.

Most commoners would only be able to afford a couple of daily bowls of corn soup with onions or the like.

Meat and other equally sumptuous vegetables would only be present on their tables during special occasions.

At least for Melissa, who hailed from a poor fishing village, the soup in front of her looked like nothing less than a luxurious meal.

(T-This is... What are they trying to do? Why would they give us something so extravagant?)

Melissa could tell the soup was hot just from holding the bowl.

Her diet for the past few years as a slave was nothing short of miserable.

She would only be fed twice a day, once in the morning, and again at night.

The slave merchant would pour the soup in plates that, more often than not, could barely hold the watery brew, and the soup itself would be nigh on tasteless.

Furthermore, ever since falling into slavery, she had never witnessed it being served hot. It was made in large batches, and was distributed in the form of a cold insipid soup.

And since the bread given along with it was never less than a couple days old, it was unsurprisingly hard. So much so, that she wouldn't have been able to eat it properly if she hadn't soaked it in the water-like soup.

Even the lowest of commoners would eat better food. They could eat meat several times a year. Compared to that, what was known as slave food was downright horrible.

That was why she simply couldn't believe what was served in front of her.

The memories from the times before she had become a slave emerged in Melissa's mind.





(Warm... It's like the soup that mother usually made...)

Even though Melissa's family had been poor, her mother would have always made sure to put warm food on their table.

Of course, it would have been just a soup affordable for poor commoners.

The ingredients themselves wouldn't have been that great. Generally they'd have consisted of just some vegetables, and only rarely would there have been fish or meat in the dish.

However, for Melissa, her mother's soup was the greatest of feasts.

Always warm, and the taste had been good too...

"Hot!"

Besides Melissa, a boy raised a surprised voice.

Along with his surprise, the bowl fell from his hands, and the soup spilled over the ground.

Looking at his hand held in his mouth, he seemed to have been unable to hold his urge and endeavored to gorge on the soup even when the master had told them not to eat it yet.

A frightened expression appeared on the face of the surrounding children.

To them, what he did was akin to abandoning one's life. Not to mention, he had also wasted such a luxurious soup...

The youths around him immediately distanced themselves from him, while he immediately crouched down out of instinct.

This was also how slaves normally behaved, since no one could predict what kind of brutality would befall them if they stayed near someone being, or about to be, punished. This behavior was concededly a form of self-defense.

The surrounding children could only pray that they wouldn't get dragged in and get punished when they saw a silver-haired girl running towards the boy.

However, their expectations and what actually followed were worlds apart...

“Are you alright?”

A gentle and calm voice was heard.

The boy who had prepared himself to receive the anticipated punishment could only look up towards the owner of the voice with fear.

“Are you really alright? No soup was spilled over your feet, right?”

Sara said those unexpectedly caring words while picking up the dish that fell to the ground.

Steam could still be seen rising from the edges of the bowl.

All the contents were scattered on the ground, spreading the smell that further stirred up the children’s appetite.

“Hmmm... For now, it seems like you're just surprised because of the hot soup... Please be careful from now on, alright?”

Hearing Sara's admonition, the boy looked bewildered.

That was because her words contained only concern for him, there was no rebuke in them.

The children from his surroundings showed the same bewildered looks.

“Right... Please eat it with caution this time, alright?... Huh? Wait, wait, waaait!”

His soup had already been absorbed by the soil, and there was no way for it to be eaten anymore.

Sara had meant for the boy to get a new one, but he greatly and dismally misunderstood her. He proceeded to kneel on the ground without hesitation and struggled to gather the spilled vegetables and meat.

If Sara had not stopped him, he would have, without a doubt, eaten the food that had

fallen to the ground.

“Not that! There! Get a new one from the woman with red hair over there!”

Due to encountering such an unexpected behavior, Sara felt a bit upset and desperately pointed towards Lione.

The boy's gaze followed the direction her finger was pointing at with anxiety and doubt. Looking at the boy's eyes, anyone could have seen that he was now frightened out of his wits.

Sara then tried to shake off his dread by talking to him.

“It's fine, go on... Listen to me, alright? You don't have to eat something that has fallen down on the ground! We have a lot of food. You can even ask for a second helping afterwards, so please, eat it carefully, alright?”

Prompted by Sara's words, all the children proceeded to gingerly ingest the food while still being fearful.

Sara felt relieved that at least they had started to eat, while at the same time feeling worried for a different reason.

“Fuuh... Will we be alright, I wonder?”

She understood Ryouma's aim.

She knew that Ryouma never considered giving them warm meals and new clothes simply out of goodwill.

It was nothing but a means to an end; to make the children remember what it felt like to have desire in their hearts; to make them remember what a will was, that is, the power of choosing their own actions and asserting their choice.

To eat, to wear clothes, and to have a place to live.

These are basic needs, and only after recognizing them as such would you seek to satisfy them. This is the origin of humankind's actions, but not its end. After that there'd be the pursuit of a better life, for oneself and the ones they love, comparing things against the others, and envying the differences. Because of this reason, a human

has the ambition to strive. Back in Ryouma's world a great statesman had once said: "A man's worth is no greater than the worth of his ambitions."

Desire is the strongest driving force to make a human act. Because there is selfishness, people seek and crave.

And a slave did not have that. They had lost something once, something they couldn't live without as human beings, their identity! They had become mere animals in human's clothing.

Of course, it was natural for them to have none of that. After all, they had abandoned their most basic foundations. And they had abandoned it because of the harsh reality that fate decreed they had to experience.

No matter how much someone told other people to never give up, if the people didn't have the will, they would never succeed.

And the slaves had even given up on trying.

However, this was not an unchangeable truth, for they were living beings, and to live is to constantly change.

And Ryouma intended to achieve that by making them remember that they were human! A creature like none other, with a will to ever move forward.

Of course, it was impossible to make them recall immediately. After all, their harsh life and the despairs that formed their current mindsets were not something so shallow or inconsiderable that could be changed in a single moment.

They were fundamentally different to the Marfisto sisters. The sisters had been war slaves, and they had come from a prestigious family. Their foundation and minds had been very strong.

That was why, before anything else, Ryouma's plans hinged on educating the children for a period of time of no more and no less than six months.

That was the grace period Ryouma was going to give them.

In that time, they also needed to regain their will and desire as humans. But if they failed...

(What are you going to do? Ryouma-sama...)

To be honest, no one knew the answer.

Not even the man himself had a clear answer for it.

Sara then stopped thinking about it and began to look around.

All the children seemed to have started eating their food.

Despite being silent, their behavior was vigorous enough.

Already, in front of the large cauldron, some of them stood in a long line, asking for another serving.

For now at least, it was enough if they could relive what it was like to have hearty meals and remember the pleasure of eating.

(It seems like the first step was successful...)

Laura, who was standing a bit away from Sara, was of the same mind. The twins' eyes met each other's, and they both nodded their heads.

(For today, we give them the carrot. After all, starting tomorrow the stick awaits...)

The children were going to be faced with harsh training by Lione and her mercenaries under her.

At first, they would aim to improve the children's basic physical strength; after that, they would gradually teach them an assortment of battle techniques, mainly with spears and swords; then how to ride a horse; then to fight with bare hands.

For one month, they would undergo a bitter and demanding training. After that, they would be taught how to use magic arts.

And during the last month, they would be thrust into real battle.

Ryouma had no need for warriors who couldn't fight.

They would have to go up against monsters, and kill them; put up a fight against people, and kill them. Those who survived all of the ordeals would be given their freedom; those who escaped would only have one of two fates awaiting them: to live the rest of their lives with the stigma of a runaway slave or death.

What Mikoshiba Ryouma wanted was the capable and unyielding ones only.

In this harsh world, the ideas of equality did not exist; only the strong could attain true freedom, while the weak lived on in misery.

There was no time to help a fellow human; those willing to live, those who wanted freedom, needed to make every effort for it!

He intended to give the chance to change their fate only to those who wished to grow stronger. However, in the end it was up to the children whether they wanted to become strong or not.

Would they die as the weak, or be reborn as the strong?

At the time, those were questions that no one knew the answers to...

# Chapter 13

## Negotiation 1

*Day 19th, 8th Month, the Year 2812, Western continent calendar.*

“Oh, Mikoshiba-dono... I heard you've recently bought a lot of slaves. Is your preparation to find personnel for developing the peninsula progressing smoothly? Well, it is not bad to have some fun with some slaves, but I'm worried about the peninsula's development you see. After all, those slaves can only be regarded as cattle or horses for the grunt work. I can't help it but feel like you might use those slave as bait for the monsters at the peninsula.”

The moment Ryouma entered the reception room, Earl Salzberg immediately showered him with probing comments.

As expected of the lord of Epiroz, he had already grasped Ryouma's movements.

The appearance of the Earl and his wife was not as glamorous as the first time they had met.

Although what they were wearing were nonetheless tailor-made clothes, the accessories on their bodies were minimal, and their outward aspect had a more relaxed air to it.

There were three steaming cups on the table, one of them was for Ryouma.

“Oh my, dear... For you to talk like that out of the blue, please let Baron-sama sit first... Please forgive my husband's rudeness. Now, please sit down.”

After having chided the Earl, his wife promptly invited Ryouma to take a seat.

“Oh, that was indeed rude of me! After all, the Queen has been constantly sending messengers, that's why I had become impatient.”

The Earl offhandedly delivered the remark while stroking his head.

As expected of husband and wife. Their coordination was exquisite.

“Ah, please don't mind it. Actually, I have a matter to discuss with Earl-sama...”

Ryouma looked at the Earl while feigning a troubled expression.

“Ho ho? Do you need something from me? Well, when the messenger came so suddenly like that yesterday, I thought something had happened but... As expected, is this about the slaves? It seems like you've really overdid it and bought a lot of slaves yesterday. Did they do something troublesome? If you wanted me to, I could make use of my name... Although it might be a bit impossible for all of them to be taken back, I can recover some of your money if you so wished.”

The Earl smirked.

He gave the strong feeling of being someone who wanted to sell Ryouma a favour.

Although Ryouma had yet to say anything, it would appear that the Earl was convinced that Ryouma was troubled by the slaves he had recently acquired.

(He believes that the slaves I bought are causing me trouble, and I couldn't smoothly sell them all back... And as expected, he's been watching us. The problem is whether that was by order of Lupis or if they did it by their own initiative.)

From the start, the reason Ryouma visited the Earl was not because he wanted to return the slaves.

He came because he wanted to negotiate a different matter.

But, the Earl's attitude was far too patronizing. It was as if he really wanted to forge some ties with the fledgling Baron before him.

At once, Ryouma talked about the reason why he had come while pretending to be in a hurry.

“Yes... In fact, I was in a pinch...”



“As expected, is this about the slaves?”

Ryouma shook his head.

The day before yesterday, Ryouma had purchased a lot of slaves from the slave merchants and was currently giving them basic training.

He came to the Earl's residence not to sell back the children.

With Ryouma denying the Earl's guess, his wife summarily followed up on the question.

“Oh, my? Then what's wrong? Our household has been asked by the Queen to help Baron-sama as much as possible. That's why I beseech you to please don't hold back. I'm sure we can help you, even if a little bit. Am I right, dear?”

Hearing the woman's query, cold sweat ran through Ryouma's back.

Although she spoke of it in a casual manner, some of the words held some clear indications.

(Being asked to help, huh... Does that mean they were asked to watch me? That bitch! As expected, she won't leave me alone and is using the Earl to watch me, huh... Fine, I'll play your fucking game, but I don't have to play by your rules...)

For Lupis who was wary of Ryouma's existence, she couldn't just leave him be. And sure enough, it turned out that she had ordered the Earl to keep an eye on him.

Once he arrived at that conclusion, Ryouma could no longer accept what was said by the Earl's wife at face value.

“I see...”

The reason why they received Ryouma with a warm welcome in the first place might also have been due to the Queen's order. However, the couple were actually not the Queen's loyal dogs she thought they were.

Despite them conveying the impression of being staunch loyalists, they had actually been embezzling the Royal resources all along.

(As expected... He's the type of person that will always choose the side which benefits him the most... If that is the case, I still have room for negotiation... In exchange for the salt vein profits, I should add a condition where he will give Lupis a false report about me... Well, everything depends on how well I play my cards here, and that's why I can't afford to screw up now.)

It was dangerous for Ryouma to antagonize the Earl and his wife at the moment.

He had to be precise with his timing.

And right then was the best timing for him to make a certain deal.

“Well, please, do not hesitate to tell me what troubles you, Mikoshiba-dono. I will do my best to help you... So then, if it was not because of the slaves, then what is your dilemma?”

The Lord of Epiroz looked at Ryouma with an inquisitive gaze.

It seemed like he was very worried about what could possibly concern the young newly entitled nobleman.

“Actually... There's a salt vein in the peninsula...”

Following Ryouma's first sentence, the room temperature dropped by several degrees in an instant.

“...Wha-what do you mean by that? Why do you know something like that? Did you investigate it yourself?”

All traces of laughter disappeared from the Earl's face, and his gaze turned sharp.

He looked at Ryouma with undisguised suspicion.

The reason why he did not try to cover it was because he thought that there was no meaning to it.

(Fuck! Why does he know about the vein? The Mistel firm should've managed that

matter with the utmost care! Is it because of the other day's dinner? What should I do? Should I kill him now? No, maybe I should confirm it first, before killing him...)

In the worst case scenario, he would just have to end up killing Ryouma.

Baron versus Earl, even though both were of noble rank, the difference in power was not small.

Besides, at the time, they were inside the Earl's residence, and the capital city was quite far away.

Frankly speaking, the Earl could have pretty much done anything he wanted in his corner of the country. However, before he really committed himself to killing Ryouma, he needed to corroborate what was really going on.

"To tell you the truth... I've received news of this yesterday."

"What?! Let me see it!"

Ryouma held out a letter.

It was made using a most common type of paper and ink that everyone could buy from any shop. The characters were messy, clearly in order to disguise the handwriting.

There was no way to ascertain the author's identity.

After the Earl read through the letter, he fell silent.

(Tch! Which bastard dared to do this kind of wanton thing?!)

The Earl tried to control his enraged heart and to analyze Ryouma's intentions.

(Damn it... Who dared to tell him about this matter? Is this the doing of Christoph's little bitch? I'm sure it was her... If it's that girl, it wouldn't be weird for her to have sniffed this matter out.)

Currently, inside Epiroz and its surrounding territory, there were very few people who could openly oppose the Earl.

Amongst them, the Christoph firm, who lost their position as the leader of the business alliance, was the Earl's most dangerous enemy.

Thanks to the Earl backing the Mistel Firm, the holder of the reins of the economy of Epiroz had changed.

However, the Christoph Firm, who had served as the trade alliance leader for many years, were an old and established firm, boasting a long history behind them.

(I've let Mistel be the leader of the trade alliance for three years now. If we can hold the position for another two or three years, we can completely crush the Christoph firm... No wait, I guess that was why, huh...)

'The Christoph firm that had been holding their ground against the Earl's pressure, had finally made their counter-attack'. That was the most likely story.

(But why did she leak this information to him?)

For Simone Christoph, finding the salt vein at the Wortenia peninsula and wanting to make money out of it was fine and all.

After all, she was a woman who managed a business firm, but the problem was how she did it.

(Why did she tell him about the vein? Why not move by herself?)

The answer was in relation to the Earl's misappropriation of the vein. To effectively use this information, it would have been more productive if she had used Ryouma to report this matter to the Royal officers.

After all, it was the truth that the Earl had been embezzling the Royal family's resources. With that, his family would have been executed.

(That is why she told Ryouma about this matter. Other than that, there's no meaning in telling him. Well fine... Let's calm down for now... It won't hurt to hear what he has to say for a bit... This is my territory after all...)

Earl Salzberg's gaze turned even sharper and colder. He was ready to bare his fangs against Ryouma. In fact, there was a time when the Earl had bared his fangs against his own father. <EN: pow! Enter the flashback>



Earl Salzberg's household, whose territory bordered with the Zalda Kingdom, had been on the verge of bankruptcy due to repeated increases in the military budget.

They had had to increase the number of troops; followed by a necessary increase in weapons procurement; not to mention the construction of a fort. The list would go on and on.

In spite of that, the Royal family had never helped them. They left the territory to be operated at the discretion of the ruling Earls.

In other words, they wouldn't intervene with what the Earl was doing, but the Crown wouldn't give them any money either.

However, without reinforcing the army, they wouldn't had been able to defend the territory.

They had saved and scrimped on as much as they could, but the Earl's household still could not shake the ghost of bankruptcy that had been haunting them and had been left in a poor state. They could only maintain the bare minimum appearance of a noble family.

Nevertheless, the Salzberg household had never complained and dutifully clenched their teeth, enduring their suffering out of sheer loyalty towards the kingdom's Royal family.

The then heir and current head of the Salzberg family, Thomas Salzberg, however, was of a different nature. He would do anything to satisfy his desires. He would see this country burn if he could be king of the ashes.

It all started when a rock salt vein was found within Wortenia five years ago.

A territory that then had belonged to the Royal family, and which now belonged to the Baron Mikoshiba Ryouma.

On the mountain a day's march north of Epiroz, a certain salt vein was discovered.

It was an accidental find.

The Wortenia peninsula had no inhabitants. That was why the peninsula was filled with monsters wandering around the territory unhindered.

Other than runaway criminals and exiled prisoners, the people who would go to that territory willingly would usually hold a certain profession.

And those folks were either adventurers or mercenaries.

People who made money out of fighting. For them, the peninsula was a good battlefield that allowed them to gain good battle experience, and also a place for them to earn some income.

In any case, only powerful monsters lived there. The leather and fangs from those monsters fetched substantial amounts of money.

Although they needed to put their lives on the line to get them, they considered the rewards to be well worth the risks.

And one such group of adventurers was the one who chanced upon the salt vein. However, even if they had found it, they couldn't directly profit from it.

Although salt was an essential item and could be traded at a hefty price, it was not something that was profitable unless one were to sell it in large quantities.

They talked about their finding at the guild when they returned to sell the goods they got from the peninsula.

And that was how it eventually reached Thomas Salzberg's ears.

For the Salzberg estate, which faced dire financial problems, such a finding, if properly handled, would have been nothing short of a blessing.

At that time, he was just a 30 years old young man. He had begged his father desperately and had asked him to use this opportunity to rebuild the household's economy.

After all, from his perspective, they had practically found a buried treasure in their backyard! To quietly let such a treasure that was practically in their grasp to go to waste or end up in someone else's hands was something he could simply not abide.

If it had been located deep within the peninsula, even Thomas would have hesitated, but this salt vein was located only a day's march from Epiroz.

Although it was dangerous with monsters around, such a distance still could be considered as close. And the encounter rate with monsters was also not that high.

However, Thomas' father ignored his pleas. No, not only had he been ignored, his father even looked at him with contempt.

It was obvious that his father was angry.

His family had been protecting the border for many years, proving time and again their loyalty to the Royal family.

Even though it was right in front of them, Wortenia still had belonged to the Crown. His son's idea of bolstering their ever decreasing treasury using the rock salt vein was the same as embezzling the Royal family's property.

With his pride and loyalty on the line, the previous Earl outright rejected his corrupt son's plan. He considered it a breach of the fealty owed to the Crown as a guardian of the public peace and order.

However, in the case of Thomas, who had been looked down by their peers because of their lack of money since a young age, his heart bore no loyalty for the Royal family, but resented it instead.

Not only was the territory far from the royal capital, what was more, the royal family had never helped them in their time of need with their economic struggles. In his eyes, for the Royal family to not intervene had been the same as to neglect them.

Of course, reinforcements would come if the Zaldians decided to launch a full-scale invasion, but for small skirmishes, all of it was to be handled by Earl Salzberg and the surrounding nobles.

For Thomas' father, that was the proof that the Royal family trusted his household... For Thomas, it was different. For him, doing something like that without expecting anything in return wasn't just not worth it, and bordered on , but it bordered on sheer stupidity.

Thomas preferred more tangible things over something obscure such as trust. Specifically, he preferred money, resources, and power.

The discussion between Thomas and his father then took a turn for the worse. There was no longer any room left for compromise between them.

Practicality and pride. There were cases where such ideas could work together, but this time, only one could be chosen.

It is said that it is our choices that show who we truly are, far more than our abilities. In the case of the overly greedy Thomas, he opted to cross path with his father.

The reason? He couldn't find any way other than to do that to fulfill his desires.

(No matter who, I won't let them get in my way...)

The Earl kept repeating to himself his life motto.

He wouldn't sit idly and let his life end then and there.

After all, he had managed to get everything he now had only after he painstakingly killed his own father...



# Chapter 14

## Negotiation 2

*Day 19th, 8th Month, the Year 2812, Western continent calendar.*

“You... What do you want?”

The Earl who had been silent finally opened his mouth.

He already had no intention to pretend and hide the truth. The tone of his voice had changed completely into one of someone who was looking down at his opponent.

He threw away his pretentious mask and looked at Ryouma with overt suspicion and vigilance.

The Earl then remembered the existence of the person who might have given the information to Mikoshiba Ryouma. He was still unable to find the reason why she did not move on her own.

Although such a juicy piece of information was enough to bring the Earl down, she did not use it herself.

And the person who received the information from her came to the Earl, and not the Royal family.

(Which means, there's one possibility... Did he want to blackmail me?)

It was something that normal people would have done when accidentally gaining information that could be turned into money.

Although the man in front of the Earl was also a nobleman, the person himself was of commoner origin. It was normal for someone like that to not be too insightful and simply ask for gold or power.

(Fuh, stupid... Do you think I will obediently pay you? No, rather, if I really gave you the money, what would you do then, huh?)

If Ryouma had really wanted to blackmail the Earl, he should have never showed his face directly. Once a blackmailer let his identity be known, he would lose one of his strongest advantages.

However, the Earl's expectation was betrayed by Ryouma's reply.

“Let's see... I want to make a trade with the Earl.”

Despite receiving the Earl's cold gaze, Ryouma's voice did not falter.

He faced the Earl head-on.

“Trade? What do you want to trade? I thought for sure you would want to blackmail me.”

Both the Earl and his wife stared at Ryouma with wariness.

With the way the atmosphere around them had become, the word ‘trade’ could be said to have had an element of extortion. So the Earl's ears mistook Ryouma's underlying message as that.

The same could be said of his wife.

That was why the Earl and his wife kept looking at Ryouma with suspicion.

“Blackmail, huh? I did think about it, but that is not what I meant... If I were to do that, I'm sure your Excellency wouldn't hesitate to cut me down...”

In response to Ryouma's answer, the Earl showed a broad grin.

That was exactly what the Earl was thinking.

After all, the threatened person should never lightly let off someone who threatened them. Because if they did, the extortion would never end.

Two times, three times, Ryouma could have extorted money and other things from Thomas Salzberg until he was robbed blind of all he possessed, be it riches or power.

That was why the Earl decided that he would never bow down to blackmail.

Even if he were to hand over some gold, it would be with the sole purpose of killing the blackmailer.

“I see... To be able to understand that, for a man who was once a commoner, you're not bad at all...”

Five years had passed since the day he began to embezzle the salt vein.

Although this secret was strictly concealed, there were a few people who managed to find out about it. However, it never reached the ears of the Royal family because the Earl had swiftly dealt with those who would disturb the clandestinity of his operations without mercy.

The Earl himself also understood that the things he did were dangerous. That was why he did it carefully and with no lack of ruthlessness.

“Dear... I'm curious about the thing that Baron-sama wants to sell to us.”

“Indeed. Well then, Baron Mikoshiba. What is the item that you want to sell?”

The Earl asked the question after hearing that his wife's curiosity had been piqued.

His tone, although still condescending as ever, was now missing his previously displayed high-handedness and was no longer looking down towards the former commoner.

Right now, the Earl was dominated by his own curiosity. The Earl wanted to know what was the thing that Ryouma wanted to sell for the trade.

“Please look at this.”

Ryouma pushed the prepared documents towards the Earl and his wife.

“This is...”

“This is a contract, right?”

“It is the contract regarding the transfer of the salt vein.”

Following Ryouma's statement, the couple quickly confirmed the contents.

“Indeed... But...”

“What does this mean? There's no money required for us to pay written in these documents...”

The couple's doubts were natural.

Since Ryouma had come with the intention to sell something, he should have written the selling price, but there was no such thing on the documents.

“I've come to sell, alright, but I do not have any intention of getting paid with money.”

The Earl and his wife showed puzzled expressions after having heard this.

“Then, what do you want from us in exchange?”

“I want the Earl to become my backer...”

“What do you mean by that? I've already told you last time that I will help you as much as I can, haven't I?”

Towards the Earl's words, Ryouma shook his head lightly. If that was what Ryouma really asked, it could be said that the Earl had already delivered.

Certainly, previously, the Earl had promised to take a friendly attitude towards Ryouma and to assist him as much as he could.

However, that was not the Earl's true sentiment.

After all, he was being ordered by Queen Lupis to monitor Ryouma, and he felt obliged to do so in order to avoid possible attention towards his defalcation of the rock salt vein.

So in the end, the truth was that the Earl did not genuinely want to help Ryouma. At least until now...

(I see... Instead of pretending to be helping him, he wants me to truly help him, huh...)

The Earl now understood Ryouma's wish.

(Well, it's not like I didn't want to help him at all... Besides, compared to Lupis who's only capable of sending down orders, this man knows what courtesy is, especially the part where he did not ask for any money in return... In addition, he seems to possess some wisdom despite being a former commoner...)

Ryouma who saw the Earl relaxing his expression lifted up the corners of his mouth into a smile.

(As expected, it was the right decision for me to not ask gold from him, huh? Well, he needs money to the point that he embezzles from the Crown after all... That's why there's no way for him to willingly give money to me. In the first place, the management of the vein is already in his possession. Even if the vein is something that belongs to me, he's not someone who would compensate me even if I were to demand it of him.)

The Earl needed gold, that was why he misappropriated the salt vein.

Even though it would've been a legitimate request had Ryouma asked the Earl to pay him off, the Earl wouldn't have nicely and peacefully handed the gold over.

Ryouma was able to see through the Earl's facade and discerned that he was a true money grubber.

Confirmation was given to Ryouma that his decision was right by way of the expression the Earl currently displayed.

"Baron Mikoshiba-sama, I still can't understand the value of these documents. Can you please elaborate?"

The Earl's wife, who was born from a merchant family, was also in possession of a strong political acumen.

She married into the Earl's household in order to establish familial connections, but she was also very good at dealing with business related issues.

From her point of view, these documents held a value that could be turned into a huge

amount of money. Yet, she told Ryouma that she didn't know of their worth.

This was in order to ascertain two concerns of hers:

Firstly, to see if Ryouma actually knew the value of these documents or not, and, secondly, whether or not this idea had come from Ryouma himself or somebody else.

She suspected that someone was actually pulling the strings from behind.

"I don't believe there's the need for me to explain it, though. The Lady is famous for being well versed in this kind of thing, am I wrong?"

Ryouma answered her together with a smile on his face.

A silent exchange took place between the two of them.

(Don't get shaken... His answer does not seem to be a lie. He really believes that from the bottom of his heart...)

"Fine then... I will admit that your proposal is worthwhile. But I'd like to have a little bit of time to consult this matter with my husband."

"Very well... We shall stop here for today... Please let me know whenever you are ready."

The couple nodded their heads following Ryouma's words.

Neither side wanted the negotiations to conclude so soon. Therefore, no one present showed any sign of dejection.

(Well, I guess it was natural... Besides, I also wanted to add some new conditions as well... It would have been terrible if we had signed the deal today... That way, I wouldn't have had enough time to plan everything properly.)

The Earl seemed interested in Ryouma's bait. What was left was to make him grab it with both hands.

(Please do take your time worrying about it...)

"Alright... we will go with that. Let's meet again another day."

After finishing their talk Ryouma bowed towards the couple and left the mansion led by the maid who was waiting outside the door.



“He left... But still, is it alright like this?”

Earl Salzberg, who was staring at the carriage Ryouma rode from the window, asked the woman sitting on the sofa.

“Yes, he should also understand everything already... Well, there's also the possibility that what he said was all an act, but if that is the case then he is a really great actor...”

The Earl's wife shrugged her shoulders.

She had an absolute confidence when it came to judging people.

Let alone the time when she was still just the daughter of an affluent merchant, after she married the Earl, the amount of sly foxes gathered around her had increased.

And as a result of meeting that kind of people on a regular basis, she became competent at discerning people's intentions.

“I see... For me, Mikoshiba's proposal sounds good enough, but, what do you think Yuria?”

The Earl spoke his mind while sitting in front of his wife. His tone was not that of someone who held the true power within the family. It felt like he was refraining himself.

But that could be explained easily. The Earl was a warrior at heart.

He preferred aggressive action and had a ruthless personality. But he also knew that he was not perfect.

Especially when it came to diplomacy and politics, he understood that his ability in that regard could at best be considered mediocre.

He strongly felt that it was only wise of him to ask for his wife's opinion on such

matters.

His wife who had seen many kinds of people for many years was the most reliable partner for the Earl.

“There’s something that I’m worried about...”

“Worried? Is it about that woman from the Christoph firm?”

For the Earl, the most worrying matter was about that.

The firm that had lost its position as the leader of the business alliance. Originally, they should have been crushed a long time ago. However, they managed to hold their ground, even though their business scale had been shrinking as of late.

But, the thing that the Earl's wife said next defied the Earl's expectations.

“No, it's something else... The one that worries me the most is that man, and his true intentions...”

“About Mikoshiba? Certainly, he's more knowledgeable compared to the normal commoner. His courtesy is not bad either... And he has a good head on his shoulders. For me though, he's a bit lacking but... You think he isn't?”

“No, I also felt that way... Even during today’s negotiations, I didn’t feel that he had an ulterior motive... It's just...”

The Earl looked at his wife who was being vague with a wondering expression.

“It's just, what? What are you worried about?”

“Somehow, someday, it felt like that man might actually crush us...”

“Khu, Khuhahahahahaha... Yuria, your wisdom has helped us a lot of times. That is why I trust your words. But for something like that to happen, isn't that impossible? How much power difference do you think exists between us and Mikoshiba? It might be different if we talk about 100 years later, but even if we talk about 10 or 20 years later, I don't think there would that much of a difference from the current situation.”

The Earl laughed off his wife’s concern. He thought that for her worries to come true



the impossible had to happen.

There was a clear power gap between Mikoshiba Ryouma and Earl Salzberg.

Economic power, political power, diplomatic force, and military power.

The Earl overwhelmed Ryouma in every aspect.

And the biggest difference lied in their power bases, that is, their fiefs or territories over which they ruled.

The territory Ryouma possessed, not only was it a conflict zone bordering another kingdom, but it was also a territory filled with monsters, and there was a grand total of 0 citizens in it.

It was a difference that was not even worth comparing.

"I guess so... Yes, you're right."

"Of course I am, Yuria. You're worrying too much. Hahahaha, still, you really make me laugh, I feel refreshed. If you are still worried, send the maid from that time and let her spy on him. You let him have her first for that reason after all. How about that? Still worried?"

Hearing the Earl's words, his wife nodded her head.

She still felt not entirely convinced of something.

However, it was something vague even for herself. That was why she tried to brush it off just like her husband told her to.

Since she was not a goddess that could predict everything.

"Fine... Let's just do that... Well then, let's see how many conditions will be added before we seal this deal with him. If we can officially secure the salt vein, we can finally relax."

"Umu... I will leave that to you then..."

This decision would decide the fate of the Earl's household.

Mikoshiba Ryouma who gained support in exchange for the salt vein, and the Earl who

gained the vein without even spending a single coin. At the time, it still remained to be seen which side had gained the most. But all that would be revealed at a later date, that is, the day the two of them faced against each other... And this story shall also be told.



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